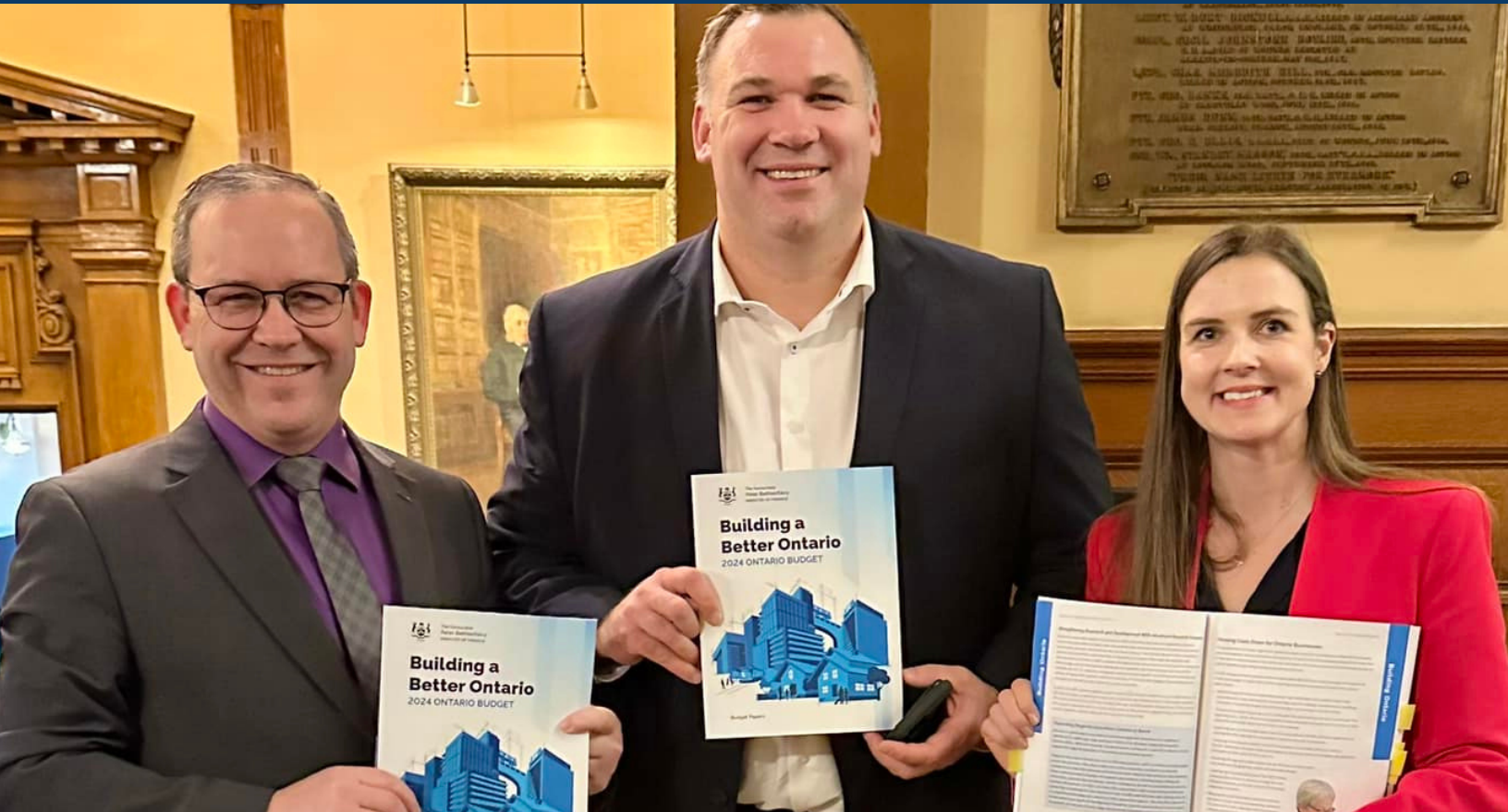




DOWNEY DIGEST

ISSUE 36 • MARCH 2024



A NOTE FROM DOUG

March is always a busy time of year, with the fiscal year end, March Break and the start of spring. During this time, its easy to get lost in the busyness and bustle. Our government has been hard at work this month, working towards building more homes and creating a more affordable province to live in. With the new spring Ontario Budget released, you can learn more about how we're doing just that.

In this edition of the newsletter, you'll find some highlights from our budget, as well as other measures the province is taking to ensure you, and your family, are able to live more affordably and have access to all the services you need.

ONTARIO EXTENDING GAS TAX CUTS

To continue keeping costs down for families and businesses, the Ontario government is introducing proposed legislation through its spring 2024 *Budget* that would, if passed, extend the existing gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts until December 31, 2024.

The Ontario government temporarily cut the gasoline tax by 5.7 cents per litre, and the fuel (diesel) tax by 5.3 cents per litre, from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2024. This legislation would ensure rates remain at 9 cents per litre until December 31, 2024., saving Ontario households \$320 on average over the two and a half years since the tax cuts rates were introduced.



The proposed extension to the gasoline and fuel tax rate cuts build on the government's additional measures to help put more money back into people's pockets, including:

- Eliminating the licence plate renewal fee in March 2022, saving the average household \$600 to date.
- Banning new road tolls on the 400-series highways in Ontario and permanently freezing driver's licence and photo card fees, saving drivers an estimated \$66 million over the next five years.
- Launching One Fare, which will save daily riders on participating systems an average of \$1,600 each year
- Introducing legislation that, if passed, would give Ontario voters a veto over a new provincial carbon tax, cap-and-trade system or other carbon pricing program.
- Ending the Drive Clean Program, saving taxpayers over \$40 million every year.

ONTARIO CONNECTING UP TO 34,000 PEOPLE TO PRIMARY CARE TEAMS IN SIMCOE, BRUCE AND YORK REGIONS

The Ontario government is investing more than \$9.8 million to connect up to 34,000 people to primary care teams in Simcoe, Bruce and York Regions. This is part of Ontario's \$110 million investment to connect up to 328,000 people across the province to primary care teams, bringing the province one step closer to connecting everyone in Ontario to primary care.

Ontario currently leads the country with 90 per cent of people connected to a regular health care provider.



As a next step to close the gap for people not connected to primary care in the region, the province is supporting 10 new or expanded interprofessional primary care teams in Simcoe, Bruce and York Regions to connect up to 34,000 Ontarians with primary care team and provide services including:

- Creating an Indigenous primary care team to serve the community in Barrie, including a mobile clinic.
- Connecting those without a primary care provider to a Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic in Innisfil.
- Expanded access to primary care and mental health services for people in Huntsville.
- Establishing two satellite clinics servicing vulnerable populations in Couchiching, Orillia and the North Simcoe area.
- Establishing a clinic in Collingwood to connect patients to primary care, including marginalized patients and those needing mental health and addictions supports.
- Establishing a new Indigenous primary care team to serve patients in the Saugeen First Nation.
- Creating a new Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic in Owen Sound
- Connecting patients to primary care and allied health services via a mobile clinic in the Bruce peninsula.
- Establishing a clinic to provide primary care and social services to those experiencing homelessness in northern York Region.

ONTARIO REWARDS BARRIE WITH \$6.34 MILLION FOR EXCEEDING 2023 HOUSING TARGETS

The Ontario government has awarded Barrie with \$6,344,201 in funding through the Building Faster Fund as the city has exceeded its 2023 housing targets, breaking ground on a total of 1,716 new housing units last year.

Announced in August 2023, the Building Faster Fund is a three-year, \$1.2 billion program that is designed to encourage municipalities to address the housing supply crisis. The fund rewards municipalities for making significant progress against their targets by providing funding for housing-enabling and community-enabling infrastructure.



Funding is provided to municipalities that have reached at least 80 per cent of their provincially assigned housing target for the year with increased funding for municipalities that exceed their target.

Any unspent funding from the Building Faster Fund will be made available for housing infrastructure to all municipalities, including those that have already received funding as a result of reaching their targets, through an application process. In addition, ten per cent – or \$120 million – of the Building Faster Fund is being set aside for small, rural and northern municipalities to help build housing-enabling infrastructure and prioritize projects that speed up the increase of housing supply.

In 2023, Ontario reached 99 per cent of its target of 110,000 new homes, which includes housing starts, additional residential units and new and upgraded long-term care beds.

Ontario broke ground on 18,992 rental starts in 2023, the highest number of rental starts on record.

GOVERNMENTS HELPING BOOST PRODUCTION OF ONTARIO MAPLE SYRUP

The governments of Canada and Ontario are investing more than \$1 million through the Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership (Sustainable CAP) to support the productivity and growth of businesses in the province's maple syrup sector.

The Maple Production Improvement Initiative is supporting 77 maple syrup producers with cost-shared funding to support a range of activities that enhance their operations. The initiative supports the purchase and installation of upgraded equipment for eligible syrup producers, that will increase productivity, efficiency and growth, such as reverse osmosis or remote monitoring systems.



The initiative was developed following discussions with sector businesses. It builds on other actions the government has taken to support the overall growth of the agriculture and food industry, such as recent investments of up to \$12 million through the Grow Ontario market Initiative, up to \$25 million through the Agri-tech Innovation Initiative and more than \$68 million through the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Initiative.

Sustainable CAP is a five-year (2023-2028), \$3.5 billion investment by the federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen competitiveness, innovation, and resiliency of the agriculture, agri-food and agri-based product sector. This includes \$1 billion in federal programs and activities and a \$2.5 billion commitment cost-shared 60 per cent federally and 40 per cent provincially/territorially for programs designed and delivered by the provinces and territories.

Ontario government calculations suggest over 1,000 jobs and close to \$42 million in gross domestic product (GDP) were attributed to the maple industry value chain (farm, processing and retail), in 2022.

ONTARIO REMOVING BARRIERS TO SPORT AND RECREATION

The Ontario government is investing \$380,000 in Canadian Women & Sports's The Next Play program to create more opportunities for girls to be active. This funding is part of the \$2 million that is being provided through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport to up to 200 community organizations across the province to facilitate accessible, affordable and inclusive sport and recreation programming.

Canadian Women & Sport's The Next Play program equips participating organizations with specialized training to counter gender bias in program design and also provides start-up grants to support community initiatives to recruit and retain girls in sport.



My office is always here to help with any provincial matters and concerns. While we endeavour to respond to every matter in a timely manner, our team is often busy helping constituents. Take a look at the month so far:



2,067

email contacts



81

phone calls



15

walk-in visits



4

new cases

You can always contact us at Doug.Downey@pc.ola.org or 705-726-5538.