

# Ontario Business Matters

Ontario Chamber of Commerce and Ontario Chamber  
Network Federal Election Campaign

## INTRODUCTION

Ontario is Canada's economic engine, responsible for almost 40% of its GDP.<sup>1</sup> Over the past 17 months, communities and businesses across the province have been adversely affected by the pandemic and the associated public health measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. As Ontario's economy continues to reopen and recover, Canada's next Parliament must adopt pragmatic solutions to support Ontario business competitiveness as an important driver of economic recovery. Simply put, issues and concerns related to Ontario business need to be front and centre this federal election.

## PLATFORM PILLARS

Longstanding issues – including barriers to interprovincial trade, relatively low immigration quotas, workforce development and digital infrastructure gaps – must be addressed to strengthen the province's long-term resilience and well-being. Special attention must be placed on policies that facilitate equitable recovery for small businesses, communities, and sectors that have been most severely impacted by the pandemic, including women, Indigenous peoples, racialized people, and businesses in the tourism, retail, and food service sectors.

In doing so, policymakers must also confront the other historic crisis facing our communities: climate change. The recent report released by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls on governments around the world to take immediate steps to curb rises in global temperatures. Ontario is uniquely positioned to serve as a global leader in cleantech and sustainable innovation, with our highly skilled workforce and expertise in everything from electric vehicles to nuclear power.

Throughout the federal election period, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and its 60,000 members in over 155 communities across the province will underscore why Ontario business matters. **With the collective voice of the Ontario Chamber Network, we will highlight policy recommendations that reflect the needs of Ontario businesses under the following pillars:**



**Workforce recovery  
and business  
competitiveness.**



**Healthy people  
and prosperous  
communities.**



**Resilient  
infrastructure.**

# PILLAR I: WORKFORCE RECOVERY AND BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS



Ontario is a top destination for investment, innovation, and talent. Measures taken throughout the pandemic acted as a lifeline to support employers and workers under difficult yet temporary circumstances. Now, as we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, Ontario businesses need strategic support from the federal government to strengthen the key enablers of competitiveness, including access to interprovincial and global markets, capital, and talent.

1. **Eliminate barriers to interprovincial labour mobility and trade.** Economic activity in Canada is hampered by inconsistent rules around transportation, the environment, securities, professional certification, agri-food marketing, food safety, and more. To ensure businesses can make the most of internal markets, Canada should work with provinces to accelerate harmonization efforts.
2. **Enhance small businesses' access to capital.** In the short-term, a replacement program for the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) would ensure businesses that were hardest hit by the pandemic are able to operate sufficiently. Further, government should consider debt relief measures, such as forgiving interest payments on COVID-related government loans, for small businesses that continue to feel the repercussions of the crisis.
3. **Expand immigration to support labour market needs.** Ontario's allocation of immigrants under the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program should be increased to reflect our growing labour market needs and supply gaps that have been amplified by the pandemic. A long-term Northern and Rural Ontario Immigration Strategy is necessary to ensure communities can attract and retain immigrants. In addition, administrative burdens within the Temporary Foreign Workers program should be addressed to support the province's growing need for labour in the agriculture sector.
4. **Reform the federal tax system.** A comprehensive review of Canada's tax system, rooted in the principles of competitiveness, simplicity, fairness, and neutrality, is long overdue. Reforms should focus on streamlining the system and incentivizing increased business investments.
5. **Increase support for the digital transformation.** Introduce permanent funding streams to help businesses pivot online, reach customers, and tap into digital marketspaces.
6. **Prioritize national privacy modernization.** Re-introducing Bill C-11<sup>2</sup> in the next parliament will set a single standard for privacy protection, preventing a costly and confusing patchwork of rules across provinces.
7. **Develop forward-looking natural resource strategies.** Ontario's mining and forestry sectors are well positioned to provide Canada and its trading partners with a reliable source of primary resources required for electric vehicles, computer chip manufacturing, buildings, and more. Cohesive strategies and targeted investments in Northern Ontario will be necessary to meet the growing demand for these products.

2 An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts

## PILLAR II: HEALTHY PEOPLE AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES



COVID-19 has exposed and amplified challenges for those who call Ontario home. To ensure an inclusive post-pandemic recovery in our province, Canada needs to invest in community well-being through reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, childcare, and health care.

1. **Advance reconciliation with Indigenous peoples of Canada.** Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued its 94 calls to action in 2015, only a handful of those recommendations have been implemented. The next Parliament – along with businesses – must do better to confront Canada’s racist legacy and the enduring implications of the residential “school” system.
2. **Increase health transfer payments to Ontario.** Pandemic measures have resulted in limited cancer screening and a surgical backlog. The increased pressures on Ontario’s health care workers and infrastructure, highlight the need for funding to address growing healthcare needs, support the province’s aging population, and prepare for future crises.
3. **Work with Ontario to improve accessibility and affordability of childcare.** Women and minority groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic with many continuing to stay at home to care for young children. To ensure a strong post-pandemic recovery, the federal government must work with Ontario to reach an agreement as soon as possible to reduce childcare costs and improve access for families.
4. **Advance opportunities for women and equity seeking groups in economic recovery.** Enhance reskilling and education programs for those displaced by technology adoption and pandemic-related job losses.
5. **Develop a national life science strategy.** A life sciences strategy that builds on Ontario’s competitive advantages in biomanufacturing and therapeutics will ensure Canada is prepared for any future health crisis, while facilitating new jobs, investment, and innovation.

## PILLAR III: RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE



Infrastructure connects Ontarians to jobs, education, goods, services, and the people they love. The federal government should be a critical partner in building modern, low-carbon infrastructure to drive our economic recovery.

1. **Accelerate investments in digital infrastructure.** As more services and workplaces become digital, digital infrastructure must be expanded and enhanced to ensure people and businesses across Ontario can access the future of jobs, education, and health care. Broadband investments should be coordinated with the private sector to avoid duplication and maximize the impact of public programs. Further, the internet of things and smart city technologies should be developed to increase living standards, maximize cost-efficiencies, and reduce carbon emissions.
2. **Electrify and expand public transit.** Support provinces and municipalities with the expansion of transit systems and the shift to electric fleets.
3. **Partner with industry to confront climate change.** The federal government can advance both decarbonization and economic recovery by partnering with industry to de-risk sustainable innovation. Ontario’s competitive advantages include cleantech, nuclear energy, electric vehicles, renewable natural gas, and biomass.