

VOTE

PROSPERITY

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce's
2022 Provincial Election Priorities

A 4-Point Plan to Support Business Competitiveness



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Overview

The business community will play an important role in the province's economic rebound. Looking ahead, policymakers will need to channel limited resources to where they will have the greatest impact. These investments should be accompanied by a strategy to support business competitiveness.

While small businesses continue to be more preoccupied with day-to-day cost pressures, larger businesses have been more focused on long-term infrastructure, regulatory, and workforce development issues. Balancing short-term needs with equally important long-term investments will support business predictability and economic growth. This includes investing in key drivers of competitiveness – such as workforce development and training, immigration, technology, infrastructure, and clean energy – and removing unnecessary barriers to growth, including outdated regulations, an inefficient tax system, and obstacles to interprovincial trade and labour mobility.

Ontario's next government faces difficult decisions on post-pandemic priorities: an overstretched health care system; the need to support certain sectors and demographics that the crisis has disproportionately impacted; fiscal pressures from an aging population; growing demand for clean energy and climate-resilient infrastructure; labour shortages; supply chain disruptions; and inflation. Against this backdrop, the OCC's election priorities outline recommendations across four key areas that support Ontario's transition towards a more resilient economy.





Pillar I:

Improve Business Confidence and Predictability

Predictability is fundamental to business confidence, economic recovery and prosperity. Businesses need a stable policy environment with clear timelines, contracts, consultations, and strategies to help them plan for the future and make long-term investments. Given the uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, Ontario must also bolster its pandemic preparedness in response to ongoing and future threats.

1. Contracts, consultations, and timelines

- a. Create mechanisms to protect and/or compensate parties from the cancellation or revisions of contracts signed with the provincial government.
- b. Commit to undertaking thorough consultations with businesses and other stakeholders prior to introducing new legislation or regulations that significantly impact labour and/or the business community.
- c. Provide businesses with sufficient timelines around significant policy changes to ensure they can successfully adjust.
- d. Ensure proposed legislation and regulations are focused on outcomes and supported by cost-benefit analyses.

2. Economic recovery planning

- a. Develop a long-term plan for economic recovery that focuses on levers of growth such as workforce development, immigration, technology, infrastructure, and clean energy and support for the hardest-hit sectors.
- b. Create a strategy to strengthen Ontario's supply chain resilience by supporting domestic manufacturing capacity, investing in major airports and transportation networks, channelling more immigration and workforce training towards labour shortages critical to the supply chain, and diversifying procurement and sourcing of components.

3. Fiscal planning

- a. Develop a transparent, long-term plan to manage Ontario's public debt and deficit for future generations without increasing taxes or cutting valuable programs and services.

4. Pandemic preparedness planning

- a. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Province's pandemic response, including business support programs and public health restrictions implemented throughout the pandemic.
- b. Develop and implement a government-wide strategy for crisis management and pandemic preparedness based on lessons learned in Ontario and best practices from other jurisdictions.



Pillar II:

Foster Business and Economic Growth

The dual economic and public health crises of the past two years have left many businesses and households in Ontario with record levels of debt and financial instability. Pro-growth measures for business will fuel economic recovery. Ontario will need to focus on actions that support business access to the capital, markets, and talent that they need to grow.

1. Capital & cost pressures

- a. Provide direct financial support towards the hardest-hit sectors with targeted grants, loan guarantees, and tax credits.
- b. Modernize Ontario's capital markets by implementing recommendations from the Capital Markets Modernization Taskforce.
- c. Further develop a competitive electricity rate program to support more investment in Ontario.

2. Markets

- a. Take bold action to remove barriers to interprovincial trade, using mutual recognition agreements and/or unilateral recognition of the adequacy of standards, where appropriate.
- b. Improve access to public sector procurement opportunities for small businesses by addressing financial and informational barriers.

3. Talent & labour

- a. Work with the federal government to expand immigration intakes and extend regional immigration programs to improve access to in-demand workers in communities across the province.
- b. Continue to reduce barriers to foreign credential recognition.
- c. Reinstate the Basic Income pilot program to assess the costs and benefits of this program in Ontario.
- d. Develop sector-specific workforce training strategies based on labour market information to address existing and forecasted labour shortages.
- e. Ensure the province has the necessary supply of trained early childhood educators (ECEs) to support the implementation of the Canada-Ontario early learning and child care agreement by expanding training options and improving access to ECE programs through added financial support.



Pillar III:

Build Resilient Communities

A strong economy is built by healthy and resilient communities. Ontario will need to address challenges within our health care system, the ongoing impacts of climate change, access to housing, municipalities' fiscal capacity to support regional economies, and infrastructure deficits.

1. Health care & public health

- a. Develop a health human resources strategy for Ontario that leverages technology, data collection, workforce development strategies, and supports for students in post-secondary health care programs.
- b. Continue to build public-private partnerships and consult on and implement Ontario's life sciences strategy to ensure that the province has access to domestic pandemic response tools such as vaccine development capabilities.
- c. Commit to making virtual care permanent and enabling digital health innovation.
- d. Improve health care procurement by streamlining the process, making it easier for smaller firms to participate, focusing on outcomes over cost, ensuring value for money, and providing long-term funding to attract investment in research and development.
- e. Develop and fund strategies to support Ontario's aging population, including a renewed dementia strategy and align with the federal government to help fund pandemic recovery strategies for community care, home care, and mental health.
- f. Create a plan to reduce the surgical and diagnostic backlogs resulting from COVID-19 in conjunction with public and private sector stakeholders.

2. Infrastructure & transportation

- a. Fast-track the rollout of broadband Internet by incentivizing private sector investments and improving public-private coordination to ensure government funding addresses gaps in coverage rather than competing with the private sector.
- b. Develop a long-term energy framework focused on securing the most affordable pathways to net-zero and ensure a competitive and transparent process for long-term energy contracts that leverages existing assets where possible.
- c. Partner with the private sector to expand low-carbon transportation infrastructure, including light-rail transit, bus rapid transit, and electrification networks.
- d. Fill transit gaps that have resulted from the withdrawal of regional bus service by expanding GO Transit and Ontario Northland in partnership with the private sector.
- e. Address existing infrastructure gaps and state of good repair projects by investing in timely maintenance, repairs, and climate-resiliency to increase the lifecycle of infrastructure assets and avoid compounded replacement costs.

3. Climate change & the green economy

- a. Implement a climate adaptation strategy, support the federal Task Force on Flood Insurance and Relocation, and commit to providing communities with adequate and sustained funding for climate resilience.
- b. Invest in clean energy technologies, such as new nuclear, and skills training programs to support their development.
- c. Work with industry and other levels of government to develop a streamlined framework for carbon capture and storage in Ontario.
- d. Develop a zero-emission vehicles strategy that integrates electric, hydrogen, renewable natural gas, and hybrid vehicle technologies.
- e. Fast-track investments in electric vehicle charging infrastructure and work towards standardized charging plugs.
- f. Establish incremental targets for low-carbon fuel blending into the existing natural gas distribution system and enable utilities to recover the incremental cost of hydrogen and renewable natural gas purchased for blending.

4. Housing

- a. Continue working with municipalities to ensure the timely implementation of intensification and density targets as outlined in provincial growth plans.
- b. Ensure there is a transparent process for ministerial zoning orders based on pre-established criteria.
- c. Develop a policy framework to expand the 'missing middle' housing supply. This includes enabling as-of-right permissions for at least four units per building in all residentially zoned areas, with a potentially higher baseline near transit stations.
- d. Work with the federal government to limit speculative buying and foreign ownership.

5. Municipal finance

- a. Undertake a comprehensive and forward-looking review of Ontario's property tax system, increase the frequency of property tax assessments, and reconsider using the highest and best use approach.
- b. Commit to the 'pay-for-say principle' which dictates that if an order of government has input into the operation of a service, it has a corresponding responsibility to fund that service.
- c. Commission an independent review of municipal responsibilities to assess, in terms of cost and service delivery, whether residents and taxpayers are better served by these responsibilities residing with the federal, provincial, or municipal governments.



**Build Resilient
Communities**



Pillar IV:

Support Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Ontarians' entrepreneurial spirit is one of the province's greatest competitive advantages. Ontario will need to foster an environment that encourages new business ideas and investments to boost productivity and create the jobs of tomorrow.

1. Technology adoption

- a. Expand programs that support small businesses with technology and online marketplace adoption, such as the Digital Main Street program.
- b. Target more support towards small, innovative businesses demonstrating rapid growth.

2. Data innovation

- a. Avoid duplicating federal privacy laws pertaining to businesses' collection, use, and disclosure of personal information.
- b. Work with health care stakeholders to improve digital health interoperability (standards and technologies) and collaborate with federal and provincial counterparts to accelerate systemic, nationwide health data sharing.
- c. Improve upon both the speed and breadth of Ontario's open data system, including through open contracting and proactive disclosures of completed freedom of information requests.
- d. Encourage and monitor the adoption of cybersecurity standards in sectors where regulators do not already enforce them.

3. Employee ownership trusts

- a. Develop a provincial framework around employee ownership trusts to reduce barriers, promote awareness, and create targeted incentives to complement the federal government's efforts.

4. Diverse entrepreneurs

- a. Support small businesses owned by women, Indigenous, and racialized entrepreneurs with financing, legal advice, mentorship, training, and supplier diversity programs.

5. Emerging industries

- a. Actively support and champion new and emerging areas of growth in Ontario's economy, including Ontario's cannabis sector.

Conclusion

Vote Prosperity is the OCC's strategy to promote economic growth and resilience in the province of Ontario. The four pillars detailed on these pages are interconnected and demonstrate the clear need for Ontario to adopt a comprehensive strategy for business success.

We believe that Ontario has the fundamental ingredients for business predictability, inclusive growth, and competitiveness. The OCC and its 60,000 members strongly encourage all parties and Ontarians to consider these policy recommendations throughout the election campaign and beyond.

For more than a century, the OCC has been the independent, non-partisan, indispensable partner of Ontario business. The OCC looks forward to working alongside the next government to pursue a prosperous future for all Ontarians.

About the Ontario Chamber of Commerce

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business.

Together with 157 member chambers of commerce and boards of trade and our network's diverse 60,000 members, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce is the indispensable partner of business.

For more than a century, the OCC has undertaken important research on Ontario's most pressing policy issues, advocating for solutions that will foster the growth of Ontario businesses and lead to the creation of jobs in the province. We support businesses of all sizes through our focused programs and services, encouraging workforce development and inclusive economic growth. This work is based on the belief that strong businesses are the foundation of a prosperous Ontario.

Our mission is to convene, align, and advance the interests of our members through principled policy work, value-added business services, and broad engagement to build prosperity for all Ontarians.

We are the most respected, trusted, and indispensable partner of business, driving government decision-making and leveraging assets across our province-wide membership to support their growth and a competitive business climate in Ontario.


From innovative SMEs to established multinational corporations and industry associations, the OCC is committed to working with our members to improve business competitiveness across all industries. We represent local chambers of commerce and boards of trade in 157 communities across Ontario, steering public policy conversations provincially and within local communities.



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A 4-Point Plan to Support
Business Competitiveness

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