



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – March 24, 2023

WOWC recognizes rural support in 2023 provincial budget, will continue advocating for the region

Southwestern Ontario – The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) recognizes the financial support from the Province of Ontario for small and rural communities in the 2023 Ontario Budget – and particularly the items that address priority issues previously raised by the WOWC for the communities in rural Western Ontario.

In response to the WOWC's recent advocacy on economic growth and workforce development, Ontario's allocation of nominations to the Ontario Immigrant Nominee Program (OINP) will increase from 6,500 in 2017 to more than 18,000 by 2025. The province will also invest an additional \$25 million over three years to attract more skilled workers, including in-demand professionals in the skilled trades, through the OINP.

"Over the next decade, the combined workforce demand in our region will be an estimated 213,900 employees, including 162,700 from replacement and 51,200 from growth. The sectors most impacted over this period are health care, construction, manufacturing, retail trade, and agriculture. These sectors are all strategically important to the economy," explained WOWC Chair Glen McNeil. "We are pleased that the provincial and federal governments will work together to attract more skilled newcomers and fill these targeted labour market gaps."

The WOWC has also been advocating over the past year on the need for the Province of Ontario to address the growing mental health and addictions crisis in small and rural Western Ontario, in addition to providing additional supports for homelessness. To that end, the 2023 Ontario Budget confirms an additional \$202 million each year for the Homelessness Prevention Program and the Indigenous Supportive Housing Program.

"This investment will help a growing number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, struggling with mental health and substance use, those escaping intimate partner violence, seniors and those experiencing poverty. Many of the WOWC's communities have worked on supportive housing projects, and this continues to be an important collaborative effort between

levels of government – of which we are quite pleased and look forward to implementing across our communities,” added Chair McNeil.

The Ontario 2023 Budget also provides for an additional \$425 million over three years towards mental health and addictions services, including to support programs that are community-led and delivered; improving access to a broad range of addictions services; supporting children and youth; and maintaining supportive housing and services for people living with mental health and addictions challenges as they transition from hospital to the community.

“The WOWC has worked closely with its partners in the health sector over the past year to better understand and outline the gaps and requirements in funding for mental health and addictions,” explained WOWC Vice-Chair Wade Mills. “The announced five-per-cent increase in base funding for our community-based mental health and addictions service providers is very welcome and is a major step forward in the right direction.”

Beyond the announcements in the Ontario 2023 Budget, the WOWC will continue to advocate to the provincial government on matters related to its priority issues. With respect to housing – including affordable and attainable housing in rural Western Ontario – the WOWC will continue to push the province for details on its commitment to “keep municipalities whole,” following the cuts to development charges in the *More Homes Built Faster Act* that negatively impact municipalities’ ability to build the infrastructure required for new homes.

The WOWC will also continue to reiterate its support and request to the Province for permanent funding of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT) programs, which provides critical funding support for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) to be paired with experienced mental health professionals in response to the substantial increase in mental health calls.

About

The ***Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC)*** is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.5 million residents. The WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research, analysis, and education. For more information, visit www.wowc.ca.

-30-

Media Contact

Kate Burns Gallagher, Executive Director
T: 519-495-6059 E: kate@wowc.ca