



Ontario

Progress Report 2008

PROGRESS REPORT 2008

This is the fifth in a series of Progress Reports on the Ontario government's plan to strengthen our province.

Each report updates Ontarians on the results we have achieved in a transparent and, whenever possible, measurable way.

Here you will find the leading results on what matters to you — the economy, education, health care, environment and our communities.

Ontarians have made significant progress by working hard and working together.

These improvements provide a strong foundation for what Ontarians will achieve together in the years ahead.

STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY

Ontario is being challenged by a slowing U.S. economy, high oil prices and a high dollar.

We will do everything we can to help our businesses and families get through this time, and help our economy emerge stronger. We'll keep strengthening the things Ontario families depend on — like our schools, hospitals and environment — to keep building a great quality of life and improve our economic advantage.

Ontario recorded its third surplus in a row in 2007–08.

We have more than 449,000 net new jobs — and billions of dollars in new investment — to show for this momentum.

We have delivered a number of important results as part of our five point plan for the economy:

1. Improving skills and education of our people

Our \$1.5-billion Skills to Jobs action plan will provide more opportunity for students and people looking for a new job. It's getting results:

- We launched the Second Career Strategy, a \$355-million program to help recently laid-off unemployed workers get the long-term training they need for a new career.

- Employers are taking on more apprentices in the skilled trades thanks to the new Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit.
- In Ontario, about 110,000 apprentices are learning a trade today — this is nearly 50,000 more than in 2002–03.
- New annual apprenticeship registrations have grown from 17,100 in 2002–03 to more than 26,000 in 2007–08.
- We are provided \$4.5 million in 2007–08 for scholarships and employer bonuses to help at-risk high school students enter apprenticeships.
- We are providing \$75 million more over three years to expand apprenticeships, rising to \$50 million annually by 2011–12.
- This year, almost one million Ontarians and businesses will benefit from over \$1 billion in employment and training services through Employment Ontario.

2. Investing in Infrastructure

Good schools, hospitals, public transit and roads help make Ontario a healthy and vibrant place to live. Investing in our infrastructure creates jobs, makes our roads and bridges safer and eases traffic congestion. That means we can all get to work, school and home to our families quicker. Improving infrastructure will also meet the needs of Ontario's growing population.

Through the Investing in Ontario Act, we provided \$1.1 billion more to municipalities to improve infrastructure like roads and bridges, expand public transit and build other municipal projects. The investment should create as many as 11,000 construction jobs in the short term and make Ontario's economy more competitive in the long term.

Over the next ten years, we will invest \$60 billion to repair and expand roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

The new Places to Grow Act ensures sustainable and prosperous growth.

So far, we have invested a record \$6.2 billion in public transit — including more than \$1.8 billion for GO Transit — to reduce gridlock and greenhouse gas emissions.

We are working to increase municipal transit ridership by 65 million passenger trips across Ontario — the equivalent of removing 54 million car trips from our roads.

In 110 communities across Ontario, we supported 88 transit systems by providing two cents per litre in gas tax funding.

We launched MoveOntario 2020 — the largest transit build in Canadian history. It's a \$17.5-billion, 12-year plan to remove 300 million car trips per year off our roads. In the spring 2008 Budget, we committed \$744.2 million to get started on 19 projects.

We created Metrolinx to build a seamless and integrated transit system in the GTA and Hamilton.

We are investing \$546 million in the Northern Highways Program to help ensure a safe, efficient, modern highway infrastructure in Northern Ontario.

3. Supporting Innovation

We are working together with scientists, researchers, entrepreneurs and the private sector to foster creativity. We want to help them develop the next great product or technology, sell it to the world and create jobs in Ontario.

We are investing nearly \$3 billion over eight years in research and development to turn new ideas into products and processes the world wants to buy.

To promote innovation in Ontario, we have launched the following projects:

- In April 2008, the International Cancer Genome Consortium selected the Ontario Institute of Cancer Research (OICR) as the secretariat, and the OICR will be the database coordinating centre for the project.
- The Ontario Research Fund Research Excellence program provided \$114.7 million for 119 projects to support research of strategic value. These investments were matched by industry and other partners for a total investment of \$344.1 million.
- Ontario is investing \$30 million under the Innovation Demonstration Fund (IDF) to support promising bio-based, environmental and alternative energy technologies. So far, the program has received 73 formal proposals and has announced commitments to 10 projects for a total IDF funding amount of \$19.5 million. This contributed to a total of \$77 million in high-value, green investment.
- The Early Researcher Awards provided \$9.24 million for 66 awards this year to help researchers build their research teams of graduate students, research associates and post-doctoral fellows.

4. Lowering the Cost of Doing Business

We want to make Ontario an attractive place to invest and create jobs. That's why our corporate income tax rate is lower than that of all 50 U.S. states.

We legislated a schedule to eliminate capital tax for all corporations in Ontario on July 1, 2010. Effective January 1, 2007, Ontario cut capital tax rates by 21 per cent and fully eliminated the capital tax for manufacturing and resource firms. In addition, corporations that have taxable capital of \$15 million or less pay no capital tax.

We are cutting business education taxes by \$540 million over seven years.

In the 2008 Budget, we announced a plan to accelerate the Business Education Tax (BET) reductions in northern Ontario, ensuring that northern businesses benefit from the full BET reduction by 2010, four years earlier than originally announced.

Businesses will save more than \$2.5 billion per year when our tax relief measures are fully implemented.

5. Strengthening Key Partnerships

We are sending the message to companies around the world that if you've got a project that will grow your business and create jobs, we'll make it happen in Ontario. Working together with business helps keep our economy strong.

We created the \$1.15-billion Next Generation of Jobs Fund to encourage new and green technologies that can be marketed to the world.

The government also established a \$500-million Advanced Manufacturing Investment Strategy. So far, we are supporting projects that will generate almost \$880 million in new investment and create or retain 4,000 jobs with this strategy.

We have also launched a new foreign investment strategy. In 2007–08, we attracted 38 international investment deals worth \$670 million, which helped create or retain 8,411 jobs.

That strategy has been supported by Ontario business missions to China, India and Pakistan. The missions generated more than 70 agreements to develop new trade, investment and educational opportunities for Ontario.

In 2007–08 our government opened three new International Marketing Centres in Paris, Beijing and Mexico City, to assist in attracting foreign direct investment and promoting the export of Ontario's goods and services.

In early 2008, we worked with De Beers to open Ontario's first-ever diamond mine near Attawapiskat.

We began providing quarterly rebates under the Northern Pulp and Paper Electricity Transition Program in July 2007. So far, \$59.8 million in electricity rate relief has been provided. There are nine locations currently participating in the program.

Ontario's forest sector programs created or secured 4,917 jobs and leveraged \$368 million in new private sector investments since 2005.

More than 10,000 jobs are being created or sustained through the \$364 million we have invested through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund since 2003.

We have boosted tax credits to keep Ontario competitive in the global entertainment market:

- Ontario Film and Television Tax Credit increased from 30 to 35 per cent
- Ontario Production Services Tax Credit increased from 18 to 25 per cent
- Ontario Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit increased from 20 to 25 per cent

EDUCATION

Today's students are the workforce and citizens of tomorrow and they are the key to our future prosperity. We are committed to making our publicly funded education the very best in the world. Supporting educators, parents and students through major investments in the Ontario education system will help students succeed.

Annual education funding will reach \$19.06 billion for the 2008–09 school year. This is an increase of \$702.5 million or \$473 more for every student, compared to last year.

Since 2003, we have increased annual funding for education by over \$4.3 billion. That's \$2,606 more for every student — an increase of 35 per cent.

School boards in rural Ontario are projected to receive \$132 million in new annual funding in the 2008–09 school year, bringing their total funding to \$3.45 billion. This is an increase of \$106 million or 3.2 per cent over last year — \$570 per pupil.

Since coming to office, annual funding for rural boards has increased by \$687 million or 25 per cent. That works out to \$2,995 more per student, an increase of 39.5 per cent.

Smaller class sizes

In 2003–04, one quarter of all primary (junior kindergarten to Grade 3) classes had 25 or more students. Larger class sizes can be hard to manage.

By 2007–08:

- 99.7 per cent of primary classes had 23 or fewer students.
- 88.4 per cent of primary classes had 20 or fewer.

We are on track to have 90 per cent of primary classes with 20 or fewer students this fall.

Higher test scores

Overall, 65 per cent of Ontario Grade 3 and 6 students are meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math. That's from 54 per cent in 2002–03.

In 2008–09, we are funding 9,640 new teachers:

- 5,100 new primary school teachers to help bring down class sizes.
- 2,630 elementary specialist teachers, helping to improve reading, writing and math skills — and boost student achievement in areas such as music, the arts and phys-ed.
- 1,910 more secondary school teachers to support student success and help more students graduate.
- Student achievement officers from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat are working with principals, teachers and board leaders in almost 1,100 schools across Ontario to help improve student reading, writing and math skills.
- More high school students graduating
- We have helped raised the high school graduation rate, from 68 per cent in 2002–03 to 75 per cent for 2007–08.
- To ensure students continue learning until at least age 18, we have introduced new legislation, expanded co-op programs and created more ways to earn high school credits.

Other steps include:

- Adding a full-time Student Success Teacher in every secondary school.

- Funding 92 innovative “lighthouse projects” in 2007–08 to work with students to keep them in school, as well as to encourage those who’ve recently left school to return.
- Introducing formal links between high schools and universities and colleges, which stress the importance of reaching higher.
- Offering the Specialist High Skills Majors Program in 338 schools.
- Expanding the Pathways to Education program with a \$19-million investment in 2007–08 to give more students from at-risk neighbourhoods a fair shot at success. The program began in Toronto’s Regent Park neighbourhood and has now expanded to Lawrence Heights and Rexdale in Toronto, as well as neighbourhoods in Kitchener and Ottawa.

Good, safe places to learn

As of May 2008, about 10,700 construction projects were completed or are underway at our schools, part of an ongoing \$4.8 billion investment in repairs, renovations and new school construction. We have built or are planning to build 284 new schools and more than 3,500 schools have undergone safety audits.

More ways we have made schools safer include:

- Funding for bullying-prevention programs — \$1,500 per elementary school and \$2,000 per high school.
- \$5.7 million to train 5,000 teachers annually since 2004 and 7,500 principals and vice-principals to undergo specialized bullying-prevention training.

Giving kids the best start in life

We have created more than 22,000 childcare spaces across Ontario since 2003.

We appointed an Early Learning Advisor to report back on how best to implement full-day learning for Ontario’s four and five-year-olds, laying the foundation for a healthy and productive lifetime of learning. So far, he has met with 1,700 Ontarians in roundtable discussions across the province.

We are expanding Ontario’s Parenting and Family Literacy Centre Program. For the 2008–09 school year, we will invest \$8 million to support 123 centres in schools across Ontario. This includes \$2 million for 34 new centres. Parent workers who staff the centres work closely with kindergarten teachers to provide a quality learning environment that prepares young children for school. The centres are free to attend and no pre-registration is required.

Reaching higher

Reaching Higher — a \$6.2 billion plan to improve accessibility, affordability and quality when it comes to universities and colleges in Ontario — was launched in 2005.

Under the plan, we have added 100,000 new spaces to our colleges and universities — a 25 per cent increase from 2002–03.

About 71 per cent of OSAP recipients — 150,000 students — are benefiting from improvements such as new grants, increased weekly limits, and allowances for books and computers that have been introduced since 2004–05.

We expanded Access Grants by doubling the family income eligibility level to \$74,800 to assist 56,000 students with their tuition.

We introduced the Textbook and Technology Grant this fall to put more money back into the pockets of students. More than 500,000 full-time university and community college students will be eligible to receive \$150 towards their school supplies this year.

We capped tuition increases — after we froze tuition for two years — at an average of five per cent annually.

We invested \$240 million in operating funding over two years to support 14,000 more graduate student enrolments by 2009–10.

Every college and university in Ontario has benefitted from a \$400 million investment over two years to renew existing academic facilities.

We invested \$3 million in bursary support over three years to help about 1,900 first generation students overcome financial barriers to participating in post-secondary education.

Starting this year, eligible students who go away to school are getting a \$300 annual grant to help them return home for visits with family. Students who live at home and commute regularly back and forth are getting \$500 each semester. To be eligible for these grants, a student must live in a rural or northern community more than 80 kilometres away from a college or university.

BETTER HEALTH

Nothing is more important to Ontarians than the health and well-being of their families. Working together, we have come a long way in improving our health care system. Our plan moving forward includes better access to family care with more doctors and nurses,

and more family health teams and nurse-led clinics. It also includes expanding our wait-times agenda to include emergency rooms.

More nurses and doctors

We are attracting more doctors and nurses. We have a new marketing and recruitment centre, guaranteed job opportunities for new nursing grads and initiatives to keep experienced nurses on the job longer to retain their valuable knowledge and skills. About half-a-million more Ontarians now have access to a family doctor, compared to 2003.

We are creating 9,000 nursing positions over the next four years. About 8,000 nursing positions have been created in the last four years including 1,200 Registered Practical Nurse positions in long-term care homes. So far, over 4,643 Ontario nursing graduates have been matched to job opportunities through the government's Nursing Graduate Guarantee.

We have doubled the number of nurse practitioner education spaces from 75 to 150 a year and are investing in 50 more over the next four years.

The 25 new Nurse Practitioner (NP) Led Clinics will build on the experience of the existing NP pilot clinic in Sudbury (the first of its kind in Canada), small northern/rural Family Health Teams as well as the 23 stand-alone nursing stations in isolated areas. These 25 new NP Led Clinics will reach about 50,000 people in 25 communities.

We created 150 new Family Health Teams in 112 communities, including 49 in rural and northern Ontario.

First-year medical school enrolment is up by 23 per cent, so more doctors are being trained.

We created 75 per cent more family medicine training positions — they have meant we graduated 330 more family doctors in Ontario over the past two years.

To improve access to doctors in the north, we opened the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. With campuses in Thunder Bay and Sudbury, it is the first new medical school in Ontario in decades.

We are developing four new undergraduate medical education campuses (MECs) in Kitchener-Waterloo, Mississauga, Niagara and Windsor. The Kitchener Waterloo MEC opened in December 2007 and the other MECs will be opening over the next two years.

About 1,030 new international medical graduates (IMG) have been issued practice licenses in Ontario between 2003 and 2006. Since 2004, we have more than doubled the number of training and assessment positions available for IMGs from 90 to 200.

We have almost doubled the number of Community Health Centres (CHCs) and satellites to improve access to health care in communities — 49 new CHCs and satellite centres are established or under development.

Shorter wait times

Compared to four years ago, Ontarians are getting:

- Cataract surgery 193 days faster
- Hip and knee replacements 176 days and 217 days earlier
- Cancer surgery 22 days sooner
- Cardiac procedures up to 33 days quicker
- MRI and CT scans 27 days and 40 days faster.

The improvement in wait times is the result of almost 1.7 million more procedures.

Ontarians can track our progress because we are the first to put wait time information online. Ontario's wait times website — which tracks and compares wait times — has been visited by Ontarians seven million times so far.

We are now expanding our wait times agenda to include general surgeries and emergency rooms. Through the \$109 million Emergency Room/Alternate Level of Care Strategy, high-priority hospitals will benefit from IT enhancements and coaching teams to make hospitals more efficient. Other measures will reduce ambulance offload delays and patient backlog.

Building and expanding hospitals

There are more than 75 major hospital expansion and building projects completed, underway or planned across Ontario.

Better access to care

To improve access to medical specialist health care for northerners, we have raised the travel grant mileage rate under the Northern Health Travel Grant Program to 41 cents a kilometre — and introduced for the first time an accommodation allowance of \$100 per eligible trip.

To ensure Ontarians receive the long-term care they need, 5,168 new beds have been added since April 2004.

We have also created 2,300 new nursing and 3,800 direct care staff positions in long-term care homes.

Investments in home care have expanded services to 220,000 more Ontarians since 2003. The availability of home care services has prevented more than one million hospital emergency room visits since 2003.

Eligible military family members are now provided with Ontario health insurance coverage immediately upon moving back to Ontario. It is estimated that this will benefit about 8,500 military family members each year.

We are working to meet the needs of our aging population by providing supports and services to seniors allowing them to stay in their own homes.

Promoting wellness, preventing illness

To protect people's health from tobacco-related illnesses, we have worked hard to toughen tobacco laws, ban smoking in public places and encourage more Ontarians to quit altogether.

Our landmark Smoke-Free Ontario Act came into effect in May 2006, making enclosed public spaces and workplaces 100 per cent smoke free.

Under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, we banned the retail display of tobacco products in May 2008.

New programs for youth are getting results: 72 per cent of high school students have never smoked a cigarette — a 15 per cent increase since 2003.

We made nicotine patches, gum, lozenges, inhalers, sprays and tablets exempt from retail sales tax.

To help our kids get off to a healthy start we:

- Added three new vaccines free-of-charge for chicken pox, meningococcal disease and pneumococcal disease — resulting in more than 1.97 million kids getting immunized and saving families up to \$600 per child.
- Expanded Ontario's newborn screening program in 2006 to make it Canada's most comprehensive. The Ontario newborn screening program now screens for 28 rare diseases and disorders, including cystic fibrosis.
- To help our young people and families lead healthy, more active lives, we have:
- Mandated 20 minutes of physical activity every day for students in all Ontario elementary schools.

- Served nearly 400,000 elementary and secondary students healthy and nutritious meals and snacks across Ontario through the Student Nutrition Program.
- Required schools to drop trans fats from food and beverages sold in schools.
- Increased our support for the Student Nutrition Program from \$8.5 million to \$17.9 million per year, beginning in 2008–09. We are helping to create 700 new programs and expanded 300 existing ones to help reduce the impact of poverty for children and youth.
- Increased funding to the Community Use of Schools program by \$13 million totalling \$33 million for 2008–09, providing facilities and space for not-for-profit groups after hours at reduced rates, or free of charge in some communities.
- Increased support for our amateur athletes by 175 per cent since 2003.
- Launched the Quest for Gold program in January 2006. Since then 1,809 Ontario athletes have received direct funding totalling \$15.7 million. Ninety-four Quest for Gold funded athletes competed at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.
- Committed \$507.9 million towards child and youth mental health for 2008–09, an increase of more than 20 per cent since 2003–04. This means more money for mental health agencies to serve children and improve wait times and access to services.

To help prevent illness, we:

- Took action to protect Ontarians against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) — a major cause of cervical cancer — by offering free vaccines to 77,000 girls in Grade 8 and saving families up to \$405 per child.
- Promoted Ontario's colorectal cancer screening program — the first of its kind in Canada. This means more than 34,000 added colonoscopies this year.
- Are making the PSA test for prostate cancer available to Ontario men age 50 and over.
- Helped the growing number of Ontarians living with diabetes through a mix of prevention, technology, personal planning and access to specialized resources and health professionals, benefitting 186,594 Ontarians so far.
- Passed new legislation to regulate the professions of traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy, kinesiology and psychotherapy — the first new health professions to be regulated since 1993.

- Provided funding to the Heart and Stroke Foundation to support 1,000 Automated External Defibrillators in communities across Ontario — the single largest government investment for public access defibrillators in Canadian history.

To help families and children with autism, we have:

- More than tripled the support for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families since 2003–04, including training for teachers, child care staff and therapists.
- Helped more than 1,400 children and youth with autism get the support they need — and we have reduced the number of children waiting for assessments by 66 per cent in the last four years.
- Made IBI Therapy available to support students with autism and their families. Twenty school boards reported having provided space for the delivery of onsite IBI Therapy.

Strengthening Medicare

To ensure Medicare is there for future generations, we have:

- Banned two-tier, pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care in Ontario.
- More than tripled funding for cancer drug treatments — from \$62.4 million in 2003–04 to \$188 million in 2008–09. In 2007–08, 25,383 patients received treatment, up from 14,211 patients in 2003–04.
- Improved care and accountability in long-term care homes to enhance and more clearly enforce the Residents' Bill of Rights that provides whistle-blowing protections for staff, residents and volunteers who report abuse and neglect.
- Strengthened pandemic preparedness by providing 15,000 emergency infection control kits to frontline health providers.
- Created the Operation Health Protection action plan to prevent and better deal with health emergencies like SARS.
- Eased the public health burden on municipalities by paying 75 per cent of the cost of mandatory public health programs, up from 50 per cent.

PROTECTING OUR SHARED ENVIRONMENT

Ontarians want clean and safe air, land and water. To ensure communities stay healthy, our government has taken great measures to protect our ecology and promote sustainable development for present and future generations. Working together, we are making positive changes:

- We created a 1.8 million acre Greenbelt across the Golden Horseshoe that permanently protects green space. We will work with communities who request to expand the Greenbelt in their area.
- We have worked with partners to protect 45 ecologically significant properties totalling 2,180 hectares, including the habitat homes of rare species on Manitoulin Island.
- We made a portion of the Greenbelt, adjacent to the Little Rouge Creek, the Bob Hunter Memorial Park. This designation protects the Rouge Park by saving woodlands in the town of Markham and stream valleys that feed the Little Rouge Creek.
- Working with our partners, we have planted 3.2 million new trees to make Ontario greener.
- We have over 26 million hectares of forest managed to sustainable forest standards — over 200 per cent more since 2004.
- We will work with First Nations, northern communities and resource industries to protect at least 225,000 square kilometres of the Far North boreal region. These lands are a globally significant carbon sink and home to over 200 sensitive species.
- Ontario's new Endangered Species Act came into effect on June 30, 2008. This new legislation is among the toughest in North America and will provide strengthened protection for species at risk and their habitat across Ontario, including the threatened Woodland Caribou.
- We are working to protect water quality in Lake Simcoe with the introduction of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act.
- Ontario now has some of the toughest rules in North America on the cosmetic use of pesticides. These chemicals will no longer be available for purchase beginning in the spring of 2009.

- We amended legislation that forces polluters to pay for their spills. We have some of the toughest hazardous waste disposal rules in North America.
- We agreed to coordinate policies on fuel standards with California. Ontario will require producers to reduce carbon emissions from transportation fuels by 10 per cent by 2020.
- There are now 50 new inspectors and other compliance staff to increase water inspections and protect Ontario's water supply.
- Environmental Education has been integrated into the curriculum from Grades one through 12, as well as an optional new Grade 11 environmental science course.

Closing down coal

CO2 emissions from coal-fired generation have been reduced by 20 per cent from 2003 to 2007.

To help reach our targets, we closed the single largest producer of air pollution in the Greater Toronto Area — the Lakeview Generating Station — the equivalent of removing 500,000 cars from our roads.

Ontario is leading North America in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and we are on track to eliminate coal-generated power by 2014.

Ensuring a reliable supply of clean and affordable energy

More than 3,500 megawatts of new power has been brought online since 2003.

We introduced North America's first renewable-energy Standard Offer Program — providing a fixed price for electricity produced by small-scale wind, solar, biomass or small hydroelectric projects, with 357 contracts in place so far totalling 1,495 megawatts.

Of these contracts, 218 are for solar energy production totalling 520 megawatts.

We are dramatically increasing energy from solar power. One of the world's largest energy farms is now under construction near Sarnia.

Ontario has gone from 10 wind turbines in 2003 to more than 700 in place or planned. We have four wind farms currently under construction that will total over 600 megawatts when complete.

We are investing \$14.4 million over four years to provide financial assistance to encourage large energy users to convert to solar hot water heating.

Encouraging families to conserve

Homeowners can get up to \$150 to help pay for home energy audits. And we are providing grants of up to \$5,000 for home energy retrofits.

Families can get a retail sales tax exemption on certain Energy Star® qualified appliances and lighting products. Over 95,000 fridges and major appliances have been collected under the Refrigerator Roundup program. Participating families are saving up to \$150 per year on the energy bills.

We banned the sale of inefficient light bulbs — they will be off the shelves by 2012.

We are helping families manage their energy costs by installing Smart Meters and time-of-use pricing. This will encourage families to use larger appliances — like washing machines — at off-peak times taking strain off the grid, while saving them money.

We launched “Bag it Back” — a new deposit return program for recycling wine, beer and spirit containers, which will help divert about 25,000 to 30,000 more tonnes of glass from landfills annually — even more than the Blue Box. Ninety per cent of these returns will be recycled for high-end uses like fiberglass insulation and new bottles.

We approved Waste Diversion Ontario’s Municipal Hazardous or Special Waste program which began in July 2008. It should divert over 23,000 tonnes of household hazardous waste from landfills in its first year alone, about 40 per cent more than the 2007 diversion rates.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES

Ontarians enjoy a high standard of living. Our friendly and safe cities and towns are admired worldwide. We welcome newcomers from all cultures to Ontario and celebrate our diversity which enriches the lives of everyone in Ontario and strengthens our economy.

Helping newcomers succeed

To help internationally trained professionals find work in their chosen fields here, we passed The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act. It ensures a fair and transparent process for obtaining registration and licensing in regulated professions. The Fairness Commissioner is now studying the registration practices of 34 regulatory bodies.

Our new Foreign Trained Professionals Loans Program is providing up to \$5,000 per person to cover assessment, training and exam costs.

To help newcomers settle, improve their language skills and find employment, we are investing about \$188 million in 2008–09 — bringing our total investment in newcomer settlement services to \$790 million since 2003.

We fought for and won fairness for newcomers to Ontario. An agreement with the federal government provides \$920 million more in federal spending on language training and settlement services over five years to 2010.

Over \$85 million has been invested in more than 145 bridging programs to help internationally trained individuals get the skills and knowledge they need to work in Ontario.

We also set up mentoring partnerships in the private sector to help newcomers adapt to life and work in Ontario. At the end of 2007, 2,600 matches had been set up. Of those who completed the program:

- 80 per cent were employed
- Of those, 85 per cent were employed in the field of their choice
- Their annual income is now 67 per cent higher than it was before entering the program
- Unemployment decreased by 78 per cent

In neighbourhoods with high newcomer populations, we have concentrated services in public schools so they are more accessible. In 2007–08, \$16 million was invested to offer this service in 344 schools, reaching 90,000 clients.

Ensuring every Ontarian has a shot at success

We launched the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) as part of Ontario's plan to expand opportunity for low-income families. As of July 2008, about 465,000 families are receiving a monthly OCB payment of up to \$600 per child annually. When fully implemented, the OCB will provide up to \$1,100 per child annually, helping 1.3 million children.

We have increased social assistance rates seven per cent over the past three years, increasing a further two per cent in December 2008.

We have raised the general minimum wage five times from \$6.85/hour in 2003 to \$8.75/hour this year — and it will continue to go up until it reaches \$10.25/hour in 2010.

We are providing housing allowances to make rent more affordable for up to 35,000 low-income Ontario families.

We funded more than 18,000 new affordable housing units for low-income families, seniors, single people and persons living with a mental illness over the past four years.

First-time home buyers can get up to \$2,000 back as a rebate on their land transfer tax.

We have invested \$23.8 million in the Provincial Rent Bank Program, which has prevented people in more than 14,300 low-income households from being evicted due to a missed rent payment.

We are providing about \$1 billion over five years in property tax relief to seniors through the new Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant.

We have invested more than \$500 million in developmental services and supports for adults with disabilities since 2003. These include:

- Launching four Community Networks of Specialized Care to improve clinical supports for individuals with a developmental disability who also have mental health issues or challenging behaviours.
- Implementing Passport, a program providing activities in the community for people with a developmental disability who have left school.
- Helping more than 800 residents move from the three remaining provincially-run facilities to homes in the community.
- Creating about 1,400 new residential spaces in addition to those created for individuals leaving the last three provincial facilities.

We have strengthened child protection services with increased investment, totalling \$350 million since 2003–04. Children's Aid Societies (CASs) are now using a strength-based approach to risk assessment allowing CASs to work more effectively with families, reduce the number of kids coming into care and provide kids in care with more stability in their placements. It is now easier for relatives or community members to provide permanent homes for children and youth. It also offers opportunities to resolve more cases outside the courtroom through alternative dispute resolution.

We have invested \$30 million to develop public libraries as community hubs of technology and recorded knowledge.

We introduced Family Day, a new provincial holiday held the third Monday in February, to give hard-working Ontarians more time to spend with the people they love.

Creating safe communities

We put 1,000 more municipal officers on our streets and announced 200 more provincial police officers.

There are now 150 more Crown attorneys to prosecute criminal offences.

We created and expanded the Guns and Gangs Task Force so the police, prosecutors and staff from the Victim/Witness Assistance Program can collaborate from the first day of an investigation. There are now 72 Crown prosecutors and six are dedicated to anti-gun smuggling as part of the task force.

We set up major crimes courts to increase the criminal justice system's capacity to respond to large-scale gun and gang-related crimes.

Young people in high-need neighbourhoods have more positive alternatives including job and training opportunities because of an \$11.2 million investment in the Youth Opportunities Strategy.

We set up a Youth Challenge Fund chaired by Mike "Pinball" Clemons, which is providing funding for 61 community-led programs targeted to young people in the GTA.

We stiffened penalties for street racers, including higher fines, automatic roadside driver's license suspensions and vehicle impoundment.

We toughened laws for drunk drivers, including:

- Stiffer penalties for first-time and repeat offenders.
- Vehicle seizures for those who drive while under suspension.
- And provided for forfeiture of vehicles from people who have at least two prior suspensions for drinking and driving offences within the last ten years.

We have taken steps to ensure that high-risk offenders are kept in prison and that those who are released are closely monitored while in the community.

Building opportunity in rural Ontario

We are doing more to help Ontario's rural families:

We have provided more than \$1.2 billion for farm income stabilization and support programs since 2003.

Farms transferred within a family are now exempted from land transfer taxes. We have improved Ontario's meat inspection system by going from 10 employees to 107 full-time and 63 part-time meat inspectors.

We provided \$60 million more on top of the regular funding to help small and rural hospitals meet the unique needs of small communities.

We have created 49 Family Health Teams in rural and Northern Ontario.

We launched a five-year, \$3.3-billion plan to invest in rural infrastructure, providing funding for roads, bridges, airports, schools and hospitals.

In 2007–08, our government invested \$8.5 million for 18 projects to bring broadband access to an estimated 200,000 citizens in rural southern Ontario.

We increased the Rural Economic Development fund by \$30 million over four years to help businesses and entrepreneurs in small towns create jobs and support their local economy.

We are promoting the sale of fresh, locally produced food through large and small grocers by raising consumer awareness with the successful marketing campaign “Pick Ontario Freshness.”