
Creating Fairness and Opportunity for People in Ontario

January 1, 2018 Marks Milestones in Plan to Help People Get Ahead in Changing Economy

NEWS

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The Ontario government has made major strides this year, fighting for fairness to make sure everyone in our province has the opportunity to share in our growing economy. In 2017, the government took historic action to deliver on its plan to help more people get ahead while continuing to grow the economy. In 2018, the plan will continue to deliver more opportunity and security for families, when a higher minimum wage and free prescription medications for children and youth come into effect on January 1.

For the third straight year, Ontario is outperforming all G7 countries in real GDP growth, and the unemployment rate has dropped to a 17-year low. But not everyone is sharing equally in these gains. Many people are struggling to get ahead in a fast-changing economy where jobs are less secure and workplace benefits are not what they used to be.

The government's plan to address these new realities has included landmark legislation, including raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and the biggest expansion of medicare in a generation with OHIP+, making prescription drugs free for everyone under 25. This year the Ontario legislature also passed measures to make it more affordable to buy or rent a home, and rolled out the new OSAP, which provided free tuition to more than 210,000 Ontario students starting this fall.

Ontario's actions in 2017 to make the province a place of fairness and opportunity include:

- **[Boosting wages and workplace security](#)**. The government is taking historic action to help people get ahead in a changing economy where many workers are struggling to support their families on part-time, contract or minimum-wage work. The Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act will increase the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by January 2019, giving more than a quarter of employees across the province a pay hike. It will also make employee scheduling fairer; require employers to pay the same wage to part-time employees who do the same job as full-time employees; introduce two paid days per year of personal emergency leave for all workers; and ensure at least three weeks' vacation after five years of service with the same employer.
- **[Providing free prescription drugs for young people](#)**. Ontario is expanding medicare so no parent will have to choose between paying for their child's prescription drugs and providing other essentials. Starting January 1, 2018, everyone under the age of 25 with OHIP coverage and a valid prescription will be able to get their medications at no cost from an Ontario pharmacy. OHIP+: Children and Youth Pharmacare will improve access to prescription medications for more than four million children and youth. A new [mobile-friendly tool](#) is available to help people find out whether their prescription is among the more than 4,400 drug products covered, including ones to treat cancer and rare diseases.

- **Giving more students a chance to go on to college or university.** The government has taken important steps to make postsecondary education more accessible and affordable for Ontario families by implementing new changes within the OSAP program. The government wants to ensure that people get into college or university based on their ability and potential — not on their ability to pay for it. Through sweeping changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), more than 210,000 university and college students are receiving free tuition for the first time ever in 2017–18. And in November, OSAP began accepting applications for next year earlier than ever so students can find out sooner how much financial support is available to them — which may be more than they expect.
- **Helping more people find an affordable home.** Ontario benefits greatly from new residents attracted to the Greater Golden Horseshoe by the region's economic strength. Yet this influx has added to the unsustainable demand for housing and helped drive dramatic price increases. The Fair Housing Plan's package of 16 measures in Ontario is making housing more affordable for homebuyers and renters, while bringing stability to the real estate market. It includes introducing a 15 per cent Non-Resident Speculation Tax; expanding rent control to all private rental units; and identifying provincial surplus lands that could be used to create new affordable and rental housing.
- **Building and strengthening ties with U.S. governors to support free trade.** Both Ontario and the U.S. benefit enormously from free trade as part of a strong and integrated economic partnership that supports millions of jobs on both sides of the border. During the lead-up to and start of NAFTA renegotiations, Premier Wynne dramatically stepped up her engagement with U.S. governors to advocate for Ontario, defend workers' interests and champion the province's role as an essential partner in their economies. The Premier attended the Summer Meeting of the National Governors Association in Rhode Island, co-hosted the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers' Leadership Summit, and connected with 33 governors one on one. Over the course of the year, she has travelled to the U.S. on seven occasions, deepening ties with allies and partners across the U.S.
- **Giving more people an opportunity to get ahead and stay ahead.** The government has launched a groundbreaking three-year pilot project to assess whether providing a basic income can help people with low incomes. This pilot is studying how a basic income might expand opportunities and job prospects for those living on low incomes, while providing greater security for them and their families. The pilot is underway in three test regions across Ontario, with a mix of urban, suburban and rural residents. As part of the next phase of the pilot, engagement will continue with First Nations and Provincial Territorial Organizations on a co-created First Nations Basic Income Pilot.

- **[Helping people and businesses reduce pollution](#)**. In the fight against climate change, Ontario chose to put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions as a realistic approach that balances action with affordability. This market-based system achieves the greatest results at the lowest cost to businesses and consumers. As part of the emissions cap program, this year the province launched quarterly auctions of greenhouse gas emissions allowances. Proceeds from the first four totaled more than \$1.9 billion, exceeding the province's forecast of total proceeds for 2017–18. By law, Ontario is investing all of these proceeds in programs to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. This includes programs and rebates for homeowners and businesses through the Green Ontario Fund; repairs and upgrades to make social housing apartment buildings more energy efficient; and support to municipalities for projects such as renewable energy and energy-efficiency improvements.
- **[Making record investments in hospitals, schools, transit, roads and bridges](#)**. Ontario's new Long-Term Infrastructure Plan (LTIP) focuses on how the government is expanding and renewing the schools our children attend, the water we drink, the hospitals where we receive care, and the roads and transit that take us home to our families each day. The LTIP highlights how the government is aligning its record investment in public infrastructure — about \$190 billion over 13 years, starting in 2014–15 — with its efforts to build a fairer, better Ontario. This includes integrating climate-change considerations into infrastructure planning; building resilient and sustainable infrastructure in an era of accelerated change and disruptive technologies; and better linking Ontario's infrastructure investment with initiatives such as apprenticeships and community benefits projects to create jobs and training opportunities for people who face employment barriers.
- **[Helping seniors age with confidence](#)**. The government is working to ensure that everyone in Ontario benefits from the wealth of opportunities the province has to offer, no matter their age. A new action plan and [web portal](#) empower seniors to make choices when it comes to their care, independence and how they access government services. It focuses on areas that seniors say they care about most, including living independently for as long as possible and staying connected through social, recreational and volunteer activities. And it massively expands the number of long-term care (LTC) beds, while increasing staffing levels and support for residents of LTC homes.
- **[Making auto insurance fairer](#)**. The government is introducing major reforms to lower auto insurance rates by addressing fraud, putting victims first and strengthening consumer protection. The Fair Auto Insurance Plan includes a review of the risk factors that insurers use to calculate premiums to ensure that drivers in certain parts of Ontario are not subject to unfairly high rates. It will implement standard treatment plans for common collision injuries to help people receive the treatment they need after an accident. It will establish independent examination centres to reduce disputes between insurance companies and people injured in collisions. As well, it will establish a Serious Fraud Office that will combat systemic fraud in Ontario, including supporting activities to address auto insurance fraud.
- **[Lowering electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all residential customers](#)**, as well as for many farms and small businesses, through the Fair Hydro Plan. The plan has reduced bills by even more for people who have low incomes or live in eligible rural and Northern communities. As part of the plan, any increases to bills will also be held to the rate of inflation for four years. Following this, the 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan (LTEP) confirms that electricity prices are forecast to [remain below the level projected in the 2013 LTEP](#).

QUOTES

“Building a fairer, better Ontario is fundamental to the success of people in every corner of our province — and it’s what drives me as Premier. We are stepping forward and meeting this new era with new ideas. From free tuition for students and free prescription medications for young people to a higher minimum wage for workers, we are creating more fairness and opportunity in our province right now.”

— Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario

QUICK FACTS

- In November, there were almost 181,000 more jobs in Ontario than a year earlier, and the unemployment rate fell to 5.5 per cent — the lowest since 2000.
- The government will balance the budget this year, as well as the next two years. That means more funding for the programs and services people rely on most, such as health care and education.
- Ontario is making the largest infrastructure investment in hospitals, schools, transit, roads and bridges in the province’s history. To learn more about what’s happening in your community, go to an interactive map at [Ontario.ca/BuildON](https://ontario.ca/BuildON).
- The spring sitting of the Ontario legislature will begin on February 20, 2018.

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