

# A Plan to Stay Open



# Table of Contents

A Message from the Minister	3
Introduction	5
Actions to date	6
Next phase of the government's plan	15
Expanding Ontario's health workforce	16
Shoring up domestic production of critical supplies	22
Building more hospital beds	26
Other ways the government is staying prepared	28
Emergency Preparedness Plan and transparent reporting to the public	29
The path forward	33
Additional support for Ontario's Plan to Stay Open	34

# A Message from the Minister



The past two years have been unlike anything the people of Ontario have ever experienced.

Our healthcare system was brought to the brink, as the number of patients in need surpassed the hospital spaces available to care for them. Our job-creators, who sacrificed so much to achieve their dreams, stepped up to help protect their communities and our healthcare system, as they were forced to close their doors for months on end. From masks to toilet paper—the world faced demands for personal protective equipment and the province faced shortages of critical supplies, as Ontarians were forced to scramble to find basic supplies to keep their loved ones safe.

It didn't have to be this way.

We must never find ourselves in this position again. This is more than a hope or an aspiration. It is a solemn commitment to the people of Ontario to never go back to the failings of yesterday. It's a promise to learn from the mistakes of the past and apply the hard lessons of decades of inaction that left Ontario on the brink. And it's a pledge to create accountability, and to give the people of our province the confidence and security of knowing that when a future pandemic emerges, Ontario will be ready.

Ontario must be ready.





A Plan to Stay Open is our government's mission to build on our progress to date. We will expand Ontario's health workforce with more doctors, nurses, and personal support workers to care for our loved ones. We will shore-up our domestic production of critical products and PPE to seize control of our own safety and protect access to the critical supplies we need. And we will build more hospital beds to safeguard and protect our healthcare systems with better access and quality of care.

This is Ontario. There is no challenge too big to overcome or goal too great for us to achieve. And together, we will ensure that Ontario is always prepared and remains open—because we can never go back to the way things were before.

Sincerely,

**Prabmeet Sarkaria,**  
President of the Treasury Board

“...together, we will ensure that Ontario is always prepared and remains open.”

# Introduction

When the province first declared a state of emergency on March 17, 2020, the government committed to take all necessary steps to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians. All options were on the table to slow the spread of COVID-19 and the people of Ontario sprang into action to protect our province against a global pandemic.

Following decades of mismanagement and ignoring warning calls, our province's health care system was not ready for such a massive shock. From hallway health care to nursing shortages to insufficient investments in new beds – frontline workers were faced with inadequate tools to fight the initial wave of COVID-19.

As our province went through the harshest stages of the pandemic, significant and longstanding gaps across our health care system were exposed – unused PPE had expired in provincial stockpiles, we were reliant on other jurisdictions for supplies, and provincial pandemic plans had not been updated since 2013. These gaps should never have been allowed to leave so many vulnerable for so long.



# Actions to date

Since March 2020, we have all taken tremendous steps to protect our families, our friends, and our neighbours. Whether you are a nurse or grocery store clerk working overtime, a small business owner struggling to keep your business afloat, or a grandparent who could not hug your grandchildren – we have all made sacrifices to protect each other.

Those sacrifices were not made in vain. Ontario, when compared with other jurisdictions, has fared well throughout the pandemic. We have been able to get through this together because Ontarians across the province stepped up.

However, the people of Ontario made these sacrifices based on a promise that, though the fight ahead would be tough, they would one day see a return to the hard-earned freedoms and opportunities that make this province and our country a place of limitless possibility. It is for this reason that the government understands that it has a responsibility to ensure that the lessons learned during the past two years inform how this and future governments prepare for emergencies.

By responding at an unprecedented pace, increasing the spaces in hospitals and long-term care homes, prioritizing our frontline workers and investing to keep our children safe – the Government of Ontario stood right with you in the fight against COVID-19.

# Standing up testing

In the early part of the pandemic, the government needed to find a way to detect our common enemy and protect our communities, so we stood up testing locations and assessment centres in every corner of the province.

As of March 2022, Ontario had completed over 23 million lab-based PCR tests and deployed over 135 million free rapid antigen tests. This includes over 96 million tests to thousands of workplaces, hospitals, home and community care settings, long-term care homes and schools and childcare centres across the province, as well as over 39 million to the general public.



# PPE distribution



When the pandemic first hit, governments across the world were battling to secure personal protective equipment and other critical supplies and equipment. In Ontario, historical red tape and poor policies had weakened our manufacturing sector. The lack of domestic production left us dependent on other jurisdictions who prioritized helping themselves. Yet again, Team Ontario stepped up to the challenge. From ventilators and face masks to nitrile gloves and hand sanitizer, businesses across the province, with the help of the government, took immediate action to boost the stockpile of emergency supplies for personal and medical use.

In April 2020, Ontario launched the \$50-million Ontario Together Fund to help manufacturers retool their operations to produce supplies and equipment for the health care sector and frontline workers. In 2021-22, the government doubled that investment totaling \$100 million.

By supporting private sector partners, and through innovative initiatives with organizations on the ground, the government was able to end the supply shortages and get made-in-Ontario PPE into the hands of frontline workers and Ontario families. As of December 2021, 46% of PPE purchased for the stockpile was sourced from domestic producers and 93% of future spend on PPE for the stockpile is forecasted to be sourced from domestic producers.





# Vaccine distribution

On December 14, 2020, we began to see the light at the end of the tunnel. When the COVID-19 vaccine landed in Ontario, health care workers across the province once again answered the call and Ontarians rolled up their sleeves.

Our vaccination rates are among the best in the world, with 91% of Ontarians aged 12 and over fully vaccinated.

In 2021-22, Ontario invested more than \$1 billion for a province-wide vaccination plan, prioritizing populations in accordance with an ethical framework, based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

Thanks to the government's investments, Ontario rapidly accelerated its booster dose rollout by expanding eligibility to all individuals aged 18 and over, as well as shortening the interval to three months following an individual's second dose. Quickly accelerating booster doses was a cornerstone of Ontario's response to the threat posed by the Omicron variant to the province's hospitals and intensive-care capacity.



# Investments in hospital and long- term care spaces

Historically, Ontario had not done enough to protect the health care system. Failure to invest in hospital and long-term care spaces resulted in patients being seen in hallways, limited ICU surge capacity and unacceptable wait times for our seniors.

In response, the government created more than 3,100 new and additional beds and invested an additional \$1.8 billion in hospitals, bringing total investments in hospitals to \$5.1 billion since the start of the pandemic.

This includes:

- \$778 million to help hospitals keep pace with patient needs and to increase access to high-quality care;
- \$760 million to support hospitals with more than 3,100 beds, the equivalent of building 6 new community hospitals; and
- \$324 million to reduce surgical and diagnostic imaging backlogs.

Since March 2020, the government has taken decisive action to support all long-term care homes, staff and residents. Actions include investing over \$2.5 billion in COVID-19 emergency funding to help the long-term care sector respond and cope with the pandemic and enacting temporary emergency orders and regulatory amendments. These supports help homes improve infection prevention and control, ensure access to personal protective equipment (PPE) stockpiles, and build a strong health care workforce that can care for residents safely.



## Investment in front line workers

Nurses and personal support workers/direct support workers have and continue to be on the frontlines of our fight against COVID-19.

We have all sought ways to demonstrate our gratitude for their commitment, through posters in windows or the unmistakable sounds of pots and pans echoing through our streets. We know that it is their dedication, long hours and increased risk that has allowed us to come through this pandemic.



The Ontario government made significant investments in these workers, which included:

- \$342 million starting in 2021-22 to strengthen the nursing workforce by adding over 5,000 new and upskilled registered nurses and registered practical nurses as well as 8,000 personal support workers to critical areas of the health care system.
- \$4.9 billion to hire more than 27,000 new positions for personal support workers, registered nurses and registered practical nurses by 2025 and ensure that residents receive on average four hours of direct care per day.
- This included:
  - Supporting homes hiring 4,050 new long-term care staff;
  - Supporting 16,000 students training to become PSWs;
  - Investing in programs to add an additional 2,000 nurses to the long-term care sector over the next four years.
- To deliver additional support, the government provided temporary pandemic pay to support the critical work of nearly 430,000 eligible frontline employees working for approximately 4,000 employers. Ontario's pandemic pay was the most generous in Canada, with lump sum payments of up to \$1,000 over the 16-week period, and no limit on hours qualifying for the \$4 per hour worked.



## Protecting our children

Over the past two school years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of education in Ontario and across the globe. To ensure a safe and successful return to school, the government is investing more in public education than any government in Ontario's history.

Following the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the government has kept the safety of students and staff a top priority, with investments including over \$600 million on ventilation improvements across the province. This includes providing 122,000 standalone HEPA filter units and other ventilation devices to schools

and childcare facilities, with mandatory HEPA units in all JK/SK classrooms and all classrooms and other learning environments without mechanical ventilation. As well, upgrades to school ventilation infrastructure and improvements to existing ventilation systems were made, including:

1. 100% of ventilation systems assessed
2. 99% of schools increased fresh air intake
3. 99% of schools running ventilation systems longer
4. 99% of schools using higher grade filters and/or increased frequency of filter changes.



The government supplied personal protective equipment and critical supplies and equipment to Ontario's schools. This school year alone more than 82 million masks, including 20 million N95s for staff and 9 million cloth masks for students, have been delivered to schools.

The government has also been focused on ensuring that a strong plan is in place to support learning recovery in our schools. This plan includes the largest provincial investment in tutoring supports. The province wide program will start in April 2022 and acknowledges the impact the pandemic had on the development of important skills including reading and math.

To cope with challenges compounded by COVID-19, school boards now have access to over \$80 million to support the mental health of all students and in 2022-23, mental health funding will increase by an additional \$10 million, this represents a 420 per cent increase in funding since 2017-18.



# Next phase of the government's plan

By almost any metric, Ontario has weathered the storm of COVID-19 better than virtually any other jurisdiction.

The government has never hesitated to take action to protect the health and safety of Ontarians. Ontario has made unprecedented investments which have helped the province respond effectively and decisively during a time of true global instability. However, the job is not done, and we need to continue to build our capacity to respond. That is why the government is taking further steps in order to ensure we have a Plan to Stay Open.

These further steps will expand Ontario's health care workforce, shore-up domestic production of critical supplies and build more hospital beds to ensure we have the capacity to meet future challenges. Ontarians can have confidence that the province will be transparent, accountable and ready for whatever future challenges arise.

# Expanding Ontario's health workforce



The key factor in any pandemic response plan is the people. Do we have enough health care workers? Are they available in the right regions? Are we training enough workers to build a talent pipeline to meet future demands?

To stay open, we need to retain as many staff as possible, rapidly train more people and break down barriers for skilled workers to choose Ontario to live and work. To prepare for future emergencies, we need to ensure that our colleges and universities are training the future workforce Ontario needs in every corner of the province. The government's Plan to Stay Open accomplishes these goals.





## Introducing the new Ontario Learn and Stay Grant

Building up our health capacity in areas where it's needed the most is an important part of Ontario's Plan to Stay Open. Rural and northern communities have seen shortages and the government is working to ensure that they have the staff needed to be able to respond to any future shocks to our health care system.

That's why the government is investing \$81 million to expand the scale and scope of the Community Commitment Program for Nurses. In 2022-23 and 2023-24, up to 1,500 nurse graduates each year will now receive full tuition reimbursement in exchange for committing to practice for two years in an under-served community.

Building on the success of the Community Commitment Program for Nurses, the government is launching the new Ontario Learn and Stay Grant. Starting in Spring 2023, applications will open for up to 2,500

eligible students each year who enrol in a high-priority program in a high-priority community and commit to work in an underserved community after graduating. Students will be eligible to receive full, upfront funding for tuition, books and other direct educational costs. Consultations will begin this summer to determine which communities and programs the grant will start with, but we know health human resources will be a key area of focus for Spring 2023.

As a result of these two programs, communities facing the most acute labour shortages in nursing will find immediate and longer-term support. In the years and decades to come, rural and northern communities will have access to a diverse and talented pool of graduates to serve in their communities and support local health care delivery and other critical labour market needs that all Ontarians deserve.

# Supporting foreign-trained medical professionals

For too long, foreign-trained medical professionals have been unable to find work in Ontario. Despite facing a generational labour shortage, newcomers to Ontario struggle to overcome longstanding barriers that restrict their ability to work in their trained profession. The most well-known of which being the requirement for “Canadian work experience”, which is an impossible catch-22 for those looking for their first jobs in Canada after immigrating.

Recently passed legislative amendments prohibit the use of this requirement and require regulatory colleges to certify potential applicants in a timely manner so that internationally trained health care workers can start working as soon as possible. Other changes passed will also ensure that the immigrants who speak multiple languages are rewarded during the application process, so that we have more health professionals who speak the language of the communities they serve in Ontario. Together, these changes will build a larger health workforce and help address immediate labour shortages across the province.

---





## Supporting the retention of our PSWs and nurses

The legislation allows the government to make temporary or permanent compensation enhancements where needed to address emerging issues that are seriously impacting the delivery of public services as Ontario recovers from the pandemic. This will also allow permanent compensation enhancements to address outstanding pay equity obligations should they exist.

Throughout the pandemic PSWs and DSWs have stepped up to the plate to fight against COVID-19 and provide quality care for our loved ones and continue to do so as Ontario recovers from the pandemic. Since October 1, 2020, Ontario has invested over \$1.3 billion to temporarily enhance wages for PSWs and DSWs to help stabilize, attract and retain the workforce needed to provide high-quality patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government is fulfilling its commitment to make the wage enhancement for personal support and direct support

workers permanent. This initiative will help bolster health human resources and build a stronger and more resilient health care system that is better prepared to respond to crises as Ontario begins its post-pandemic recovery. This change impacts approximately 158,000 PSWs and DSWs currently in the province, and ensures Ontario is retaining and attracting the best health workforce.

Similarly, nurses have also remained on the front lines with remarkable dedication and selflessness as they cared for the most vulnerable Ontarians. To stay open, the government knows that retaining a strong nursing workforce is critical. As a result, the government is investing \$763 million to provide Ontario's nurses with a lump sum retention incentive. The government will make two payments for a total of \$5,000 to nurses on the front lines. This initiative will help to retain nurses across the health care sector with the aim of helping to stabilize the current nursing workforce across the province.

# Expanding medical schools



Increasing the number of doctors, nurses and personal support workers in Ontario is a key element of the government's preparedness plan. This not only requires recruitment and retention of the nurses and personal support workers who sustain our system, but also invests in the students of today who will become the skilled doctors and surgeons of tomorrow.

More doctors serving in Ontario means better access and quality of care for hardworking families across the province. That is why the government is adding to the number of spaces at medical schools as we continue to build a stronger, more resilient health care system—especially in growing and underserved communities.

This expansion is the largest in over a decade. It includes 160 new undergraduate seats and 295 new postgraduate positions. The expansion will support all six medical schools across Ontario. Expanded undergraduate and postgraduate medical school positions will support:

- the new Ryerson medical school in Brampton
- the new University of Toronto Scarborough Academy of Medicine and Integrated Health
- expanding Queen's-Lakeridge Health Campus to support Durham Region's needs
- medical education at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine to support needs in rural and northern Ontario
- medical education at the University of Ottawa, Western University and McMaster University

The expansion will increase access to family and specialty physicians across the province, further bolstering Ontario's health resources.

# Investing in clinical education

The Ontario government has demonstrated its commitment to investing resources to ensure we have more graduates in the health care sector for years to come. The government is also ensuring that they have adequate resources in the classroom. The government is investing an additional \$41.4 million annually to support the clinical education component in our nursing education programs. This investment will enable publicly assisted colleges and universities to expand laboratory capacity supports and hands-on learning for students, providing opportunities for learners to demonstrate their knowledge in practical settings.

“These are phenomenal investments into nursing education and the future of Ontario's health-care workforce. These programs will strengthen the quality of care throughout Ontario, particularly in communities where there is a great demand for more health-care professionals.”

– Linda Franklin | President and CEO of Colleges Ontario

# Investing in mental health for front line workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on front line health care workers' mental health. In fact, most health care workers reported that their mental health has worsened since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. To support those who are on the frontlines, the government has invested \$12.4 million over two years, starting in 2021–22, to continue rapid access to existing and expanded mental health and addictions supports for health and long-term care workers across the province. These treatment options include one-to-one psychotherapy and workshops. This funding will also support needs assessments, online peer support, workplace mental health training and intervention services.



# Shoring up domestic production of critical supplies

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant pressures on the availability of critical and emergency supplies in Ontario and around the world. In Ontario, there were also limited domestically made supplies to support the surge in demand for PPE.

The government declared that “never again” will Ontario be caught solely relying on foreign manufacturers for our critical supplies in a time of crisis. As a response, the government is focused on establishing a reliable, robust and centralized personal protective equipment and critical supplies and equipment supply chain. This will ensure that the supply chain remains reliable, and that the government remains accountable to ensure that Ontario is always well-stocked with critical supplies.



# Building a robust life sciences sector

Ontario's life sciences sector is primed for accelerated growth, including expanding facilities that will attract new investments to meet growing demand for vaccine production, strengthening efforts to develop made-in-Ontario breakthrough technologies and sourcing homegrown solutions in preparation for future challenges. To do this, it is essential that Ontario companies create, commercialize and adopt advanced technologies to compete and thrive in today's global economy. A new government-wide Life Sciences Strategy is an essential first step towards establishing Ontario as a global biomanufacturing and life sciences hub.

As part of the Plan to Stay Open, the government will release a life sciences

strategy which will help Ontario further press our advantage. The strategy will be broken down into two phases. Phase 1 will focus on the immediate challenges facing the sector, including addressing challenges that inhibit growth and prevent Ontario-made solutions from helping Ontario patients. Phase 2 will focus on building capacity to build and buy made-in-Ontario health innovations over the balance of this decade and beyond.

Boasting the largest life sciences sector in Canada, one that provides 66,000 well-paying jobs for hard-working Ontarians, the province is well positioned to leverage its strengths in the sector to produce game-changing and life-saving solutions right here at home.

“We commend the Ford government for its highly comprehensive Plan to Stay Open. Our sector particularly welcomes the plan's increases to health system capacity, the shift to necessary centralized oversight of the province's PPE and critical supplies stockpiles, and the forthcoming Life Sciences Strategy, which are all incredibly important initiatives to ensure that Ontario is ready to respond to any health emergency in the future.”

– Nicole DeKort | President and CEO, Medtech Canada

# PPE reporting and accountability



In the early days of the pandemic, Ontarians were left scrambling for PPE, as our medical professionals were left dependent on international shipments of items such as masks and gloves. Shortages at the beginning of the pandemic showed that we need to establish a reliable, robust, centralized personal protective equipment and critical supplies and equipment supply chain to meet the needs of all Ontarians and to ensure that frontline workers have the products they need to be safe, irrespective of global challenges. This supply chain needs to be maintained and enhanced to withstand the challenges of everyday and extraordinary events, ensuring that Ontario's protection never again solely depends on outside sources—and help us seize control of our own protection.

Through the passage of this legislation, the province will be required to maintain a Personal Protective Equipment and Critical Supplies Equipment stockpile. This stockpile will supply PPE/CSE during normal operations and during extraordinary events. This will include the planning, procurement, storage, distribution and management of PPE/CSE. By making these changes, Ontarians can have confidence that the government will be held accountable for protecting Ontario and that the province has a stable and steady supply of equipment in both good times and bad.



# Offering to sell or sale of PPE/CSE

While the last two years were dominated by stories of people pulling together, unfortunately there have been those who have looked to take advantage of a shortage of critical supplies. Included as a schedule in the Pandemic and Emergency Preparedness Act, 2022, the province prohibits any person from offering to sell or resell any government-supplied personal protective equipment or critical supplies provided without charge or payment of a fee. This will ensure that those who would seek to take advantage of hard-working people who play by the rules will face stiff penalties for their actions.

## Keeping shelves stocked with essentials



The government is committed to ensuring Ontarians can access a stable supply of safe, high-quality food. Our experiences with COVID-19 have reinforced the importance of having a safe and stable food supply in this province, and these actions build on the work the government did to support crucial food operation capacity. Through recently passed legislative changes, the government will strengthen the agri-food sector's ability to overcome pressures posed by potential future emergencies to strengthen its future economic prospects and support a safe and stable food supply in the province. The legislation also makes sure that, in the event of significant disruption to Ontario's food terminal, the government can pivot to temporary locations for a period of up to 30 days to safeguard the food supply.

# Building more hospital beds

Hallway health care has been a problem in Ontario for decades. Investing in new capital projects to improve and expand hospital infrastructure and create more hospital and long-term care beds will be essential to ensuring Ontario is never again left with our care capacity at such vulnerable levels. Making investments in communities that have not seen a new significant capital project in decades will ensure that every corner of Ontario has access to the quality care they need and deserve.



“Ontario’s hospitals are very proud of their high levels of efficiency, but Ontario had the same number of hospital beds at the start of the pandemic as it did 20 years ago – with a population that has grown by 2.8 million people. The Ontario Hospital Association thanks the Government of Ontario for this investment as it provides hospitals across Ontario with additional funded beds to better meet the needs of patients in their communities.”

– Anthony Dale | President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association

# Creating more spaces

The government is investing \$22 billion over the next 10 years to address longstanding challenges around bed shortages. These investments will increase capacity in our existing hospitals, build new health care facilities in our communities, and renew aging hospitals and community health centres. This investment results in the launch of 50 major projects that will add approximately 3,000 new beds over the next decade.

This is on top of the continuation of the 3,100 acute and post-acute care beds the government has already added to the system.

## Building up our long-term care capacity

When managing long term care throughout the pandemic two, things were made clear: there were not enough spaces for our seniors-leaving them on waiting lists for far too long-and the oversight on resident's safety needed to be vastly improved.

From 2011-2018, 611 net new long-term care beds were built in the province. During the pandemic, gaps were exposed, and it was clear that immediate action needed to be taken to protect the most vulnerable.

As a result, the government has committed \$6.4 billion to build 30,000 net new long-term care beds by 2028 and upgrade a further 28,000 beds across the province.




Further, to ensure long-term care resident safety, the government is providing an additional \$72.3 million over three years to increase enforcement capacity, including doubling the number of inspectors across the province by 2022-23. This will make Ontario's inspector-to long-term care homes ratio the highest in Canada, and will help ensure residents get the quality of care they need and deserve.

# Other ways the government is staying prepared

The pandemic brought to light long-standing, systemic challenges due to decades of neglect and chasing priorities that did not serve the people of Ontario in their hours of greatest need. The consequences of these failings cost Ontario dearly in the early days of the pandemic, and they highlighted the importance of emergency oversight and accountability and the need to ensure there is always a watchful eye kept on Ontario's readiness.





# Emergency Preparedness Plan and transparent reporting to the public

COVID-19 demonstrated the need for this and future governments to provide a clear and comprehensive framework for dealing with provincial emergencies. To ensure that Ontario is ready, recently passed legislation requires the government to develop and make publicly available a provincial emergency management plan that is reviewed and revised at least every five years. An annual report detailing the progress that has been made on achieving the objectives of the provincial emergency management plan is also required. Publishing the annual report online will increase transparency and improve proactive information sharing with the public and with stakeholders.

# Enhanced data access and sharing



The province's 51 Ontario Health Teams bring together health service providers to deliver comprehensive and coordinated care to Ontarians and have contributed significantly to the province's response to the pandemic. To support ongoing system transformation, pandemic response and development, new legislative amendments will improve the sharing of personal health information, while ensuring important and long-standing privacy protections remain in place.

This will assist the health care system in responding to evolving pandemic needs, better understanding the patients and communities they serve, and designing and delivering integrated, coordinated care.

# High priority communities strategy

The government initially provided targeted funding to support 17 communities that were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The government is providing an additional \$25 million to continue delivering access to testing, increasing vaccination rates, and providing support such as connection to isolation centres, income supports and food banks in areas that have faced harsher impacts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Infection Prevention and Control Hub Program

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of having strong Infection Prevention and Controls in place. The government and health care settings right across this province have worked hard to set up IPAC controls across a multitude of settings and environments. We remain committed to this effort and to help ensure the province's most vulnerable and those who care for them are safe, the government is investing an additional \$20 million in 2022-23 to the Infection Prevention and Control Hub Program.

This initiative provides community based, congregate living settings, such as long-term care homes, with direct access to local IPAC expertise, collaborative assistance and just-in-time advice, guidance and direct support on IPAC practices for both prevention and response.

## Wastewater reporting

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government established the Wastewater Surveillance Initiative to detect the virus that causes COVID-19 in wastewater samples taken from communities across the province. The initiative uses wastewater sampling, together with clinical and public health data, to help local public health units identify potential outbreaks and enable more timely decisions by public health about how and where to mobilize resources in response. The government is investing an additional \$24.7 million to sustain Ontario's wastewater surveillance initiative over the coming year, while also exploring how the system could be used to detect other diseases of concern.

Wastewater surveillance is an efficient, community-level approach to monitoring the prevalence of COVID-19 in Ontario, compared to mass clinical testing, providing a real-time way to track the spread of the virus through the community – sometimes before people begin showing symptoms.

# Digitization of the provincial diagnostic network

At the onset of the pandemic, Ontario had an outdated and fragmented laboratory service and diagnostic system resulting in delayed results and a poor patient experience. The Provincial Diagnostic Network was implemented across Ontario in March 2020 and consists of more than 40 independent hospitals, public health and community laboratories.

This network of labs coordinates the processing and analysis of COVID-19 tests. The Provincial Laboratory Services Program aims to address inefficiencies in the current diagnostic landscape by building on best practices achieved through the COVID-19 Provincial Diagnostic Network, including a fully digital lab network.





# The path forward

The people of Ontario demonstrated their strength and resilience through one of the most challenging periods in our history. The government has made considerable progress toward closing the longstanding gaps within our system. Although the worst is over, we know that challenges could still lie ahead.

As the province continues to make progress in the fight against COVID-19 and follows a cautious and gradual easing of public health measures to return to a pre-COVID normal, we must never forget the circumstances that brought Ontario to the brink and required the government to take unprecedented action.

We must always remember the prudence of planning and the life-altering costs of neglect.

Expanding Ontario's health workforce, shoring-up domestic production of critical supplies, and building more hospital beds – this is how the government will ensure Ontario's health care system is truly resilient. Not just for the next pandemic, but for any emergency that threatens to place significant stress on our health care system. This is how the people of Ontario will hold their government accountable. It is how the government will support our frontline health care heroes, and ensure all Ontarians have the security and confidence of knowing that our province is prepared and their government will not rest in their fight against health and safety threats.

Together, we will make sure that we turn the page on this chapter of our province's history and build an Ontario that is always ready for the challenges of tomorrow.

# Additional support for Ontario's Plan to Stay Open

"Ontario's universities welcome the government's plan to enhance emergency preparedness, strengthen the health care system and better prepare our province for the future. These timely investments will recruit more doctors, nurses and other health care professionals and increase access to critical skills training and hands-on learning in communities throughout Ontario. Our universities will continue to work with community partners to develop a highly skilled workforce and conduct the ground-breaking research and innovation in health care, life sciences and STEM fields that will help drive economic growth and prosperity for the province."

– **Steve Orsini**

**President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities**

"A strong and resilient health care system is essential for everyone, including businesses. This plan is a great step in bolstering pandemic preparedness and addresses several of our members' concerns, including labour shortages in the health care sector, access to PPE, and increased capacity in our health system."

– **Rocco Rossi**

**President & CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce**

"COVID-19 has shown us how crippling a public health crisis can be for our economy and our society. One of the key lessons we learned is the importance of pandemic planning and readiness. Ontario's doctors are eager to work with government to implement these changes and ensure we are ready."

– **Dr Adam Kassam**

**President, Ontario Medical Association**

"The expansion of the Community Commitment Program for Nurses and the new Ontario Learn and Stay Grant will support the attraction and retention of skilled health care professionals in rural and northern Ontario and ensure better access to quality health care services in rural and remote communities."

– **Mayor Robin Jones**

**Chair, Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)**

“These proactive and creative measures, particularly with a focus on underserved communities, are needed and most welcomed. Our teams have been through a lot during the pandemic, and are providing care to an aging population. The availability and retention of qualified health human resources is definitely top of mind for health and long-term care organizations, as well as for frontline healthcare workers.”

– **Dominic Giroux**

**President and CEO, Health Sciences North**

“RNAO welcomes the expansion of nursing programs to attract and retain nurses in remote and underserved communities. Nursing is central to the health of Ontarians and our health system. RNAO will continue to do all we can to ensure a robust nursing workforce with expertise and safe workloads so people across the province have timely access to quality nursing care, in all settings and sectors.”

– **Dr. Doris Grinspun**

**RNAO CEO**

“WeRPN supports the introduction of this bill as a start to laying the groundwork for preparing Ontario for future pandemics and other threats to our healthcare system. We look forward to working with this government on the next steps needed to ensure Ontario has access to an adequate supply of RPNs to meet future health system crises.”

– **Dianne Martin**

**CEO, WeRPN**

“Re PSW wage enhancement: This announcement recognizes the value that PSWs bring to the millions of Ontarians receiving home and community care. This is an important first step in closing the wage gap between critical workforces in healthcare.”

– **Deborah Simon**

**CEO, Ontario Community Support Association**

“The Ontario Personal Support Workers Association and its members are thrilled to hear that the wage enhancement will be made permanent as this will directly help with the staffing and retention of PSWs in Ontario. We would like to express our gratitude and pride in the Ministry of Health’s continued recognition and support of the PSW workforce.”

– **Miranda Ferrier**

**CEO, Ontario Personal Support Workers Association**

“Personal Support Workers are fundamental to the success of Ontario's home care system. Home Care Ontario applauds the government for introducing legislation that will make the wage enhancement permanent. This move helps recognize the critical role PSWs play in keeping people healthy and safe.”

**– Sue VanderBent**  
**CEO of Home Care Ontario**

“With the pandemic still in effect and the next wave upon us it is even more important that Ontarians have the best protection possible in PPE. Trebor RX and other Ontario PPE manufacturers have new innovative technology that increases the protection of our critical workers. It is extremely important that the Ontario government has recognized this and supports a made in Ontario buy Canadian solution.”

**– George Irwin**  
**CEO Trebor Corp**

“I am happy with the fact that the government is taking steps to be pre-emptive for any future pandemics or any type of supply chain issues. I appreciate that the Ontario government is thinking about our future and taking the right steps to be prepared through these crucial policies and best practices.”

**– Nicholas Ledra**  
**BIOSA Technologies LTD.**

“On behalf of the Canadian Association of PPE Manufacturers (CAPPEM), I would like to thank the Ontario government for their ongoing support of Ontario manufacturers. Reducing our dependence on foreign countries and multinationals in light of increasingly unstable international supply chains is essential for the health and prosperity of Ontario. Today's announcement of the proposed Personal Protective Equipment Supply and Production Act is a major step forward in providing certainty that critical PPE will always be available to Ontarians when we need it. Canadian PPE manufacturers, many of them located right here in Ontario, produce some of the highest quality, innovative, and environmentally-friendly PPE products in the world. We commend the Ontario government's commitment to provide these products to Ontario's public services and front line workers.”

**– Barry Hunt**  
**CEO of Canadian Association of PPE Manufacturers (CAPPEM)**

“Today’s announcement that the 3,100 temporary hospital beds created during the pandemic are to be made permanent represents the largest one-time increase in Ontario hospital capacity since the late-1990s. Ontario’s hospitals are very proud of their high levels of efficiency, but Ontario had the same number of hospital beds at the start of the pandemic as it did 20 years ago – with a population that has grown by 2.8 million people. The Ontario Hospital Association thanks the Government of Ontario for this investment as it provides hospitals across Ontario with additional funded beds to better meet the needs of patients in their communities. In the time ahead, we must build off the momentum of this investment with long-term health services capacity planning. Let’s also ensure that hospitals and the wider health care system are supported with the financial resources to meet the needs of Ontario’s rapidly growing and aging population and that, working together, we ensure Ontario has enough health care professionals and workers to provide care in hospitals and other settings. Hospitals will always focus on making the best use of taxpayer dollars but after a two-decade-long focus on efficiency and the punishing experience of the ongoing pandemic, it’s clear that Ontario’s hospitals need to grow again.”

**– Anthony Dale**

**President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association**



ISSN 0837-4740 (PRINT)  
ISSN 1718-7982 (ONLINE)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2022