

Ontario NDP Response

Questions of Importance to Rural and Northern Ontario for Provincial Parties and Candidates (2018)

The ten questions below were developed based on rural and northern responses to an online survey by the Rural Ontario Institute conducted between January and February 2018. There were over 600 respondents from all walks of life and regions of the province.

1. Access to quality medical services nearby has emerged again as a priority concern for rural and small town Ontarians who typically live some distance from urban facilities and services. What is your party's platform with respect to the accessibility of health care and quality medical services near to rural and northern residents? Is the current situation satisfactory? How would your party's approach to health care improve the lives of rural and northern Ontarians?

Access to health care is one of the most important things that people count on government to deliver. But for too long, people have been told to settle for cuts to rural health services, making it harder for people to access the health care they need. Liberal and Conservative governments have cut local hospitals and the services they deliver, while the Wynne government has undermined the relationship of trust with physicians.

It doesn't have to be this way. It's time for change – and we need *change for the better*.

Andrea Horwath and Ontario's New Democrats will work with physicians and medical professionals to improve access to medical services for rural and Northern residents, including access to urgent medical appointments. We will protect local hospitals by addressing the funding crunch that has threatened their very existence; with our plan, annual funding for hospitals will keep pace with inflation, population growth, aging, and the unique needs of our communities – including rural and remote locations.

We will expand access to non-profit community-governed health care by building new community health centres in all 35 local regions across Ontario that do not currently have access to Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics, Centre de santé communautaire, and Community Family Health Teams.

We will invest \$300 million in better home care, to ensure consistent, reliable care throughout Ontario. Too many people in rural and Northern Ontario cannot get the home care they need; we are going to change that. The level of home care services that people receive should always be based on their health needs, not on where they live.

In addition, our plan to ensure that all Ontarians can access dental care – either through their workplace benefits coverage or with their health card – will require better access to public dental clinics, especially in rural and remote communities. That’s why New Democrats will invest \$25 million in capital funding to make it easier to access dental care in Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, and local public health units. This funding can support seven mobile dental buses to serve remote and rural communities, and 70 new dental clinics across Ontario.

Andrea Horwath’s plan for better health care is available at: <https://www.ontariondp.ca/platform>

2. Much of rural and northern Ontario has an older demographic than urban places making services for an aging population a priority for many. Does your party have a proposed policy agenda that it would implement relevant to these specific geographies?

Yes. To make sure that health services keep up with the needs of an aging population, we will ensure that hospital funding reflects the pressures of aging. Our commitment is to ensure – for the first time – that hospital funding keeps up with the costs of inflation, aging, population growth, and the unique needs of our communities, including our rural and remote communities, each and every year. That means an increase to hospital funding of over \$1.2 billion this year.

3. What would your party do to protect the quality of water in Ontario lakes, streams and rivers?

The Ontario NDP believes that access to safe and clean water is a human right and a public trust. We will create an Ontario Water Strategy to guide land use planning, environmental approvals and other government actions wherever the public’s right to water is at stake. We will work with municipalities, conservation authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that Source Water Protection Plans are implemented so every Ontarian has access to water that is safe for drinking, swimming and fishing — with no more water advisories.

4. The cost of energy is a concern. How does your party’s platform respond to this?

The Ontario NDP will help rural families and businesses with their electricity costs by getting private profits off their hydro bill, starting by bringing Hydro One back under public ownership and control. Rural households and farmers paid to create Hydro One, but they were an afterthought when this crucial public asset was sold off. The NDP

hydro Plan will also eliminate unfair delivery charges for rural customers, and we will make time-of-use metering optional.

The NDP has also committed \$100 million for rural natural gas infrastructure, which provides a more sustainable and affordable alternative to high-carbon fuels like diesel or oil.

5. What actions would your government take to increase the availability of beds in long-term care facilities in rural and northern Ontario?

The sad truth is that seniors in too many long-term care homes haven't been getting the care they need or the attention they deserve. There are more than 32,000 people waiting for a home in long-term care. The wait is years long, and that leaves some languishing in hospital beds and others living in a place where their safety isn't protected or their needs cared for.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can fix seniors care – and make sure that it works when our aging parents and grandparents need it.

Andrea Horwath and Ontario's New Democrats will create 40,000 more long-term care beds, including 15,000 new beds over the next five years. Our investment will focus on expanding the not-for-profit and municipal sector, where funding goes to patient care instead of profit. This will include investment in culturally-appropriate care: offering seniors greater access to care in their primary language, eating food they are familiar with, and engaging in activities they know and love.

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will restore a legislated minimum standard of care for every long-term care resident in Ontario, and fund long-term care homes so they can meet it. That standard will require every long-term care home to give each resident a minimum of four hours of hands-on care every day on average.

In our first 100 days in government, Andrea Horwath and the NDP will expand the mandate of the public inquiry into long-term care to find and fix the specific problems that have been stripping seniors of their dignity. We'll hear directly from families about their experiences, and address solutions around:

- Safety of residents and staff
- Quality of care
- Funding
- Staffing levels and practices
- Regulation, enforcement and inspections
- Capacity, availability and accessibility in every region
- The impact of for-profit privatization on care
- Government action — and inaction — on past recommendations

We will also update Ontario's Long-Term Care *Residents' Bill of Rights* to include the right of spouses not to be separated against their will. Couples who have spent their entire lives together should never be separated by a system that doesn't work for them.

6. A broadband internet connection is now an essential service. Many parts of rural and northern Ontario lag far behind urban counterparts in both access and speed of connections. What plans does your party have to close this gap? Will the relatively small amount of funding the federal budget recently included hamper your party's intention to act on this?

The Ontario NDP platform commits \$1 billion over 10 years to bring broadband connectivity to rural Ontario. That is \$100 million annually.

7. What initiatives do you think a provincial government should take to respond to farmland loss concerns and protect farmland? Do you have any specific proposals in your campaign?

The Ontario NDP supports land use planning policies that ensure that growth is responsible and sustainable, and doesn't needlessly pave over family farms. We will work with farmers and rural communities to protect Ontario's watersheds and irreplaceable prime farmland from unchecked sprawl, land speculation and aggregate extraction.

8. What actions would your government take to ensure food security across the province?

Andrea Horwath and the NDP will develop a Provincial Food and Water Strategy, to promote health through access to healthy food and drinking water, and to strengthen the resilience of Ontario's food systems. We will develop and enforce policies to increase food security and protect clean water.

9. What is your party's proposed approach to financing for local municipal infrastructure?

The Ontario NDP has MPPs from all regions of the province, representing both rural and urban ridings and communities of all sizes. We understand that one-size-fits-all does not work for Ontario municipalities, especially not municipalities in rural Ontario. The Ontario NDP platform supports the principle of regionally-based economic strategies that build on the unique strengths of Ontario's various regions, including rural Ontario, while addressing each region's unique challenges.

With the new requirement of asset management plans, there is an opportunity to move away from arbitrary and inconsistent application-based infrastructure funding programs towards more reliable and predictable funding programs that allow municipalities to make long-term plans. The Ontario NDP also recognizes that mandatory asset management planning, while beneficial, places disproportionate burdens on smaller communities. We will work with smaller municipalities to ensure that they have the capacity to fulfill provincial requirements

10. Municipal financial stability for rural and northern communities is part of the focus of AMO/ROMA and FCM advocacy. Our survey suggests it is likewise a priority for rural and small town Ontario residents. How would your government deal with cost-sharing between levels of government? What transfers/investment programs do you believe require change or continued support in the coming years? Are taxation powers appropriately balanced?

The Ontario NDP is committed to Ontario's rural and northern communities. We will increase the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund to \$550 million, with regular increases in the subsequent years, to ensure that smaller municipalities have access to reliable funding to provide the municipal services people depend on.

The Ontario NDP opposed the downloading of provincial services onto municipalities under the PC government in the late 1990s, and we remain disappointed that the Liberal government has made some of these problems even worse with further downloads and cuts to programs such as Connecting Links. We will work with municipalities to create a "new deal" that ensures that local services and programs are delivered and funded by the level of government that makes the most sense for Ontario families and businesses.

Finally, we welcome you to articulate your party's plan or strategy in terms of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's Producing Prosperity campaign, which has the support of the Eastern and Western Warden's Caucuses among others. One of the elements of the campaign is distributed development or place-based rural development as advocated in the Rural Ontario Foresight Paper, Growth Beyond Cities: Place-based Rural Development Policy in Ontario, by Dr. David Freshwater. What do you see as the key rural and small town development opportunities that will inform your approach to governing?

See above. Bottom line: the Ontario NDP will remove the barriers — like the lack of access to broadband internet, affordable energy infrastructure, local schools and hospitals — so families will want to remain in or move to rural Ontario, and so farm and other businesses will have the infrastructure and services needed to support a strong rural and agricultural economy that all of Ontario benefits from.