

Rural Ontario Institute
7382 Wellington Rd. 30, RR#5
Guelph, ON
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Dear Suzanne & Pat:

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak about the issues facing citizens in rural communities across Ontario. I am happy to respond on behalf of the Green Party of Ontario.

Rural Institute Questionnaire - GPO Response

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?

No, the current situation is not satisfactory. The Green Party wants to make sure that every person in Ontario has access to the best possible care, when and where they need it.

We believe that comprehensive primary health care should be the foundation of our health system. Every person in Ontario should have access to a primary health care provider in a timely manner in order to ensure health promotion, illness prevention, and community wellbeing.

The Green Party supports the following actions in order to provide better health care for people living in rural Ontario:

- Empower Nurse Practitioners as primary health care providers, especially in areas that lack primary care options.
- Increase funding for telemedicine, including telepsychiatry, and full-scale Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams in rural areas.
- Establish the availability of a full list of core services, including specialized health services, within every Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).
- Support special public transit services for rural residents to access health care.
- Expand the number of and access to Nurse Practitioner-led clinics in all parts of the province.
- Develop a health care capacity plan to reopen hospital beds, operating rooms, and services based on the population's need for care.

- Expand access to multiservice and integrated primary care models, such as family health teams, nurse-led clinics, community care centres, and Indigenous health access centres.
- Prioritize health care investment in frontline services rather than administration. This means hiring more nurses across the province.

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?

The Green Party is committed to supporting the health and wellbeing of Ontario's elderly population via the following actions:

- Reduce overcrowding in hospitals with a system-wide strategy to better use existing resources in home care, long-term care, nurse-led clinics, primary care, and community care.
- Develop a health care capacity plan to reopen hospital beds, operating rooms, and services based on the population's need for care.
- Increase the number of Nurse Practitioners in long-term care and acute care facilities to improve patient care and outcomes.
- Monitor and improve the quality of care in long-term care homes and reduce wait times for elder care.
- Increase funding for home and community care to provide support for people to live at home longer.
- Invest additional resources to improve the availability of assisted living and transitional living for seniors.
- Provide support for family members who care for an infirm relative full time.
- Develop and fund research into smart home technology to enable us to age in place and stay in our communities.

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

The Green Party is dedicated to the protection of water quality and its quantity in our streams and lakes. We must ensure that drinking water needs are met for all Ontarians today and tomorrow, and we can do so through the following actions:

- Manage water as a public trust in the public interest. Ensure public ownership and control of water in Ontario.

- Prioritize public drinking water for communities and people as the top priority for making water use decisions in Ontario. Establish a priority of use list for issuing water taking permits.
- Grow the Greenbelt to protect a “Bluebelt” of sensitive and significant hydrological and ecological areas where urbanization should not occur.
- Make polluters pay for cleaning up contaminated groundwater by giving the government the power to immediately contain or clean up spills or runoff that threaten aquifers, and pursue remedies through the justice system.
- Provide incentives and assistance for farmers to use less fertilizer and to better control farm field runoff.
- Invest in the monitoring and protection of the Great Lakes, including long-term funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and other programs protecting the lakes.
- Create an action plan to fight algae in Lake Erie and to clean all Ontario lakes.
- Increase funding to Ministry of Natural Resources and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to better carry out their responsibilities after decades of underfunding.

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

Our current electricity system is expensive and unsustainable. We can save Ontarians money on their bills by purchasing low-cost hydro power from Quebec, prioritizing energy conservation, and investing in community-based renewable energy projects instead of getting locked into costly and environmentally unsustainable nuclear plants.

The Green Party will work to reduce electricity costs by:

Supporting low-cost renewable energy generation that cuts costs and supports local economies

- Import green hydro power from neighbouring provinces. Hydro Quebec has offered to sell power to Ontario at 5 cents per kWh - a much better deal than the 16.5 cents per kWh that Ontario Power Generation wants for nuclear power. This would save Ontario more than \$12 billion over the next 20 years. We can also start negotiations with Manitoba Hydro to build a new hydro storage and wind powered grid.
- Provide incentives for small renewable energy projects (wind, solar, heating, storage, electric mobility, and micro-hydro) to reduce overall demand and increase local energy security and community benefits.

Cutting unnecessary and excessive spending on nuclear rebuilds

- Say no to the electricity price increases requested by Ontario Power Generation to finance the multi-billion price tag of rebuilding the Darlington nuclear station. Place a moratorium on rebuilding any nuclear plant until an independent public review of costs and alternatives is conducted.
- Shut down the Pickering Nuclear Power Station when its operating license expires in August 2018. Immediately starting to decommission and deconstruct the plant will create 16,000 jobs and save up to \$1.2 billion. Decommissioning and dismantling it could create 32,000 person-years of direct and indirect employment between now and 2030.
- Avoid having Ontario's nuclear plants become expensive stranded assets by keeping the existing stations at Bruce nuclear and Darlington nuclear to the end of their current operating lives without spending additional dollars to rebuild them.

Increasing conservation and efficiency

- Engage with municipalities, co-ops, Indigenous communities, electric and gas utilities, energy-efficient appliance and equipment manufacturers and distributors and other corporations to pursue all cost effective energy conservation and efficiency options that can meet our electricity needs.
- Prioritize investments in energy efficiency and conservation efforts before turning to new sources of generation as the lowest cost and most effective way to achieve a 100% renewable energy goal.

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

The Green Party would increase the availability of beds in long-term care facilities by taking the following actions:

- Monitor and improve the quality of care in long-term care homes and reduce wait times for elder care.
- Increase funding for home and community care to provide support for people to live at home longer.
- Invest additional resources to improve the availability of assisted living and transitional living for seniors.
- Provide support for family members who care for an infirm relative full time.
- Develop and fund research into smart home technology to enable us to age in place and stay in our communities.

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?

No. We need to increase funding to ensure that everyone has access to high-speed internet in all parts of the province.

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?

Ontario is losing green space and farmland at an unsustainable rate. Aggregate mining is prioritized over the protection of water, natural heritage, and farmland, and urban sprawl threatens the places we love.

The Green Party would identify and permanently protect Ontario's prime farmland and its farmers, opposing investor-state dispute mechanisms that undermine our sovereign ability to protect Ontario's water, farmland, and natural resources.

We would also freeze urban boundaries immediately to stop urban sprawl and protect farming, water, and natural heritage in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

In addition, we support expanding the Greenbelt to protect a "Bluebelt" of sensitive and significant hydrological and ecological areas where urbanization should not occur.

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

There are several facets to ensuring access to healthy, quality, and local food sources for people across the province.

We need to make sure that we are supporting our local Ontario farmers. We need to set measurable Ontario food purchasing targets for all public institutions. We also need to preserve Ontario farmland. We are currently losing farmland at the unsustainable rate of 360 acres per day—an area equivalent to the size of Toronto each year. This threatens Ontario's ability to feed its own people. We will expand the Greenbelt and introduce legislation to permanently protect Ontario's prime farmland and source water regions.

We also support the implementation of a provincial school food program to ensure students have access to healthy, local, sustainable food, as well as the development of community food hubs to empower people to grow and make their own food, which improves food literacy and supports community gardens and kitchens.

We would also reinstate the Eat Right program, which helps individuals and families make healthy food choices, and provide startup grants for Northern Ontario and First Nations communities to build water purification systems and grow food year round in their communities.

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

Our plan calls for provincial funding for 50% of net transit operating costs for municipalities. We would also increase infrastructure spending on transit that is consistent and create long term dedicated funding for walking /cycling infrastructure.

We also support more funding for libraries, and measures to assist municipalities in mitigating the effects of climate change.

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?

We support dedicated and stable funding for Ontario municipalities to be used exclusively toward investments in municipal infrastructure.

We will support continued shared royalty funding with Indigenous and Northern communities. As well, we believe that our public resources are extremely valuable, so we will increase the public return on mining and raise aggregate levies. The resulting revenue sharing benefit with First Nations and northern municipalities would be approximately \$1.23 billion over 4 years.

You can find the rest of our Vision for Ontario at www.gpo.ca/vision and our costed platform at www.gpo.ca/platform.

Sincerely,

Samantha Bird
Director of Operations
Green Party of Ontario