

The Queen's Park Guide

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Did you know?

Employment in Ontario decreased by 15,800 jobs in December. This loss was followed by an additional loss of 4,900 jobs in November. The unemployment rate increased to 6.5% in December from 6.2% in November.

After 7 months of employment increases, national employment declined by 18,700 jobs. The national unemployment rate was 5.9% in December.

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Women in skilled trades



On March 6, 2008 Deb Matthews, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, announced the government is providing 152 low-income women with

training in carpentry, welding, horticulture, painting-decorating, cooking and landscaping.

Ontario is facing a shortage of skilled trades workers. By 2025, Canada's skilled labour shortage will reach 1.2 million people.

The \$1.5 million investment from the province's Women In Skilled Trades program will help address this worker shortage by giving low-income women the skills training they need to build a higher quality of life.

The training is being provided in Burlington, Hamilton, Hawkesbury, Kenora, Fort Frances, Waterloo and Toronto.

"When we support women, we build stronger communities and a stronger Ontario. Let's celebrate and recognize the talented and dedicated women in our lives," said Matthews.

Age-related macular degeneration



Ontarians suffering from Neovascular (wet) age-related macular degeneration (AMD) will now have access to the new prescription medicine Lucentis.

This condition is the leading cause of blindness in Canada. It is a degenerative condition

affecting central vision in people typically aged fifty and older. Lucentis works to maintain and even improve vision affected by wet AMD.

The government's investment of over \$100 million over three years means that Ontarians suffering from AMD will, for the first time, have access to this groundbreaking drug.

Approximately 10,000 patients are treated for AMD in Ontario each year.

ColonCancerCheck



Starting in April, Ontarians age 50 and over will be able to get a take-home colorectal cancer screening kit, called a Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT), from their health care provider.

People who have an increased risk of colorectal cancer because of a family history of the disease and those who have a positive home-screening test will receive a colonoscopy.

When caught early through regular screening, there is a 90 per cent chance colorectal cancer can be cured. That's the message behind a new public awareness campaign called ColonCancerCheck.

The ColonCancerCheck public awareness campaign consists of:

- A television advertising campaign featuring computer generated see-through characters in animation, to be broadcast in 22 languages across the province
- FOBT kits available to all Ontarians from their health care provider
- ColonCancerCheck.ca, a new website with information on colorectal cancer, risk factors and prevention
- Education for health care providers on the importance of screening their patients.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Ontario. Today, just one in five Ontarians age 50 and over are screened.

CritiCall Ontario



On March 18, 2008 the government announced Dr. Avery Nathens has been named as Medical Director for CritiCall Ontario. CritiCall is

responsible for facilitating the efficient flow of patients requiring acute medical services across Ontario.

Every year, over 10,000 critically ill patients are moved from one Ontario hospital to another in order to access the correct specialty service. CritiCall Ontario supports physicians across Ontario in accessing and managing the critical care needs of patients, coordinating patient transfers and working to ensure that patients receive care as close to home as possible.

As Medical Director, Dr. Nathens will work with hospitals and physicians from across the province to develop improved protocols for inter-facility medical consultation and patient transfer. A priority task will be to work with the members of the Neurosurgical Expert Panel to ensure patients requiring neurosurgical care can get access to care as close to home as possible.

Dr. Nathens is currently the Division Head in General Surgery and Director of Trauma at St. Michael's Hospital, in Toronto.

"Dr. Nathens' work in analyzing regional trauma systems has provided important insights into managing how patients move across Ontario's hospital network," said Dr. Bernard Lawless, Provincial Lead, Critical Care and Trauma, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Nursing graduate guarantee



Eighty-six per cent of new nursing graduates who have completed the Nursing Graduate Guarantee program have landed full time work in Ontario over the past year.

Ontario's Nursing Graduate Guarantee is a new program designed to give nurses on-the-job experience following graduation.

Over 2,660 Ontario graduates have taken advantage of a job opportunity through the program, which provides a guaranteed seven-and-a-half month work placement to transition into a full-time permanent position as they become available. Preliminary data from more than 165 employers indicates that, of those graduates who have completed the program, 86 per cent have secured full-time employment and another 10 per cent have part-time employment.

Investing in Ontario Act

On March 12, 2008 Ontario Finance Minister, Dwight Duncan announced the government is proposing legislation that would dedicate additional surpluses to Ontario's communities.

The proposed bill, which would be called the Investing in Ontario Act, would direct a portion of provincial surpluses to municipalities for infrastructure needs, such as improving roads and bridges, expanding transit and upgrading social housing.

Currently, all year-end surpluses are directed towards provincial debt reduction.

"The proposed Investing in Ontario Act would strike a balance by ensuring that surpluses would go to both debt reduction and to government priorities," said Duncan. "Investing in municipal infrastructure not only addresses the capital needs of our communities, but it also creates more jobs in the short term and prosperity in the long run."

Low-income families



On March 17, 2008 the Ontario government announced new initiatives to support low-income families.

The government will invest \$135 million over three years in a dental care plan for low-income families. Public health units, community health centres, dentists and dental hygienists will provide prevention and treatment services.

The Student Nutrition Program will be doubled with a three-year \$32-million investment to expand existing services. These programs currently provide healthy snacks and meals for 400,000 kids across Ontario.

Another \$100 million will be provided this year to assist with repairs to about 4,000 affordable housing units. Ontario municipalities will also now be able to get up to \$500 million in low-cost loans from Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority (OSIFA) to repair affordable housing.

Speed limiters



On March 19, 2008 Transportation Minister Jim Bradley announced the government is introducing legislation that if passed will cap the speed of large commercial trucks at 105 kilometres per hour by making speed limiters mandatory.

A speed limiter is an electronic device that caps the top speed of a truck.

An educational enforcement period of six months would be instituted before speed limiters were made mandatory, targeted for 2009.

"Slowing down big rigs on our highways would make our air cleaner and keep traffic moving at a safe speed. Speed limiters are another step in working together to build a cleaner, greener and stronger province," said Bradley.

New Hydro One Chair



On March 14, 2008 Ontario Minister of Energy Gerry Phillips announced the appointment of James Arnett as the new chair of Hydro One, effective March 31.

James Arnett recently chaired a provincial panel that recommended significant changes to the way compensation is set for senior executives in Ontario's public electricity sector, including Hydro One. The panel also made

recommendations on how Ontario's five electricity sector institutions can work together more efficiently. Arnett succeeds Rita Burak, who is stepping down after nearly five years as chair.

"James Arnett is the ideal choice to lead the board that governs Hydro One," said Phillips. "His business experience and familiarity with our electricity sector will help us move forward Ontario's long-term plan for a secure, reliable and affordable electricity system."

Upcoming events

April 24, 2008 - Fundraising breakfast with the Hon. Chris Bentley. The breakfast will take place from 7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. at the National Club in Toronto. Tickets are \$350 per person.

For more information or to acquire tickets please contact the Pathway Group.

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