



ONTARIO GREENS' Plan for the North

Authorized by the CFO of the GPO

Ontario Greens' *Plan for the North*

Northern Ontario boasts some of the most beautiful natural places in the province and has the potential to thrive as a world leader in developing climate friendly businesses and good green jobs.

However, its needs are unique. Rural, remote and Northern communities face particularly severe health care and education staffing shortages, heightened mental health and addictions challenges, restricted and unreliable access to clean drinking water, high-speed broadband internet, and quality transportation options. And there is no question the North is seriously impacted by the affordability crisis.

The Ontario Greens recognise that Northerners know their region's unique needs and are committed to rebalancing government funding for the North and building a true partnership with First Nations and Métis communities.

Table of Contents

Create good green jobs in the North	2
Expand access to quality healthcare in Northern communities	3
Invest in a mental health and addictions strategy	4
Improve funding for education and French language access	5
Protect Ontario's natural heritage	6
Partner with Indigenous communities	7
Improve connections to the North	8

Create good green jobs in the North

Ontario has the opportunity to lead in building the new climate economy and the jobs of the future, today. But we need to invest in the infrastructure and the workforce to get us there.

We need to invest in new sustainable mining technologies and education so we can become leaders in the new climate economy.

We need to invest in high, value-added sustainable wood manufacturing to build the carbon efficient mass timber homes we need while keeping good jobs in Northern Ontario.

With the right vision, Northern Ontario can thrive as a world leader in developing climate friendly businesses and good green jobs.

- Work in partnership with Northern municipalities and Indigenous communities to build shared prosperity in mining and forestry.
- Promote and protect Northern mines as part of a comprehensive electric vehicle strategy for Ontario.
- Increase sustainable, circular and Indigenous-led access to critical minerals and metals while fully adhering to principles of UNDRIP.
 - Invest in mining technology and innovation careers through partnerships with Northern postsecondary institutions.
 - Develop the Ring of Fire in partnership with Indigenous communities, respecting Indigenous sovereignty and equity ownership, resource sharing with Indigenous communities and local municipalities, while utilizing sustainable mining practices to minimize environmental harm.
- Maximize job and economic benefits for Northern communities by removing barriers to mass timber building:
 - Support high value added wood-based manufacturing in the North, such as manufacturing cross-laminated timber from small-dimensional wood that is sustainably grown and harvested.

- Support Forest Stewardship Council certified harvesting of Ontario forest products to grow our sustainable forestry industry and create good jobs, in partnership with Indigenous peoples.
- Invest \$1.8B to give 60,000 people across the province the skills and experience to work in the green economy through a year of free college tuition plus a year of guaranteed work when they graduate, with targeted recruitment of women, Indigenous people, and racialized communities.

Expand access to quality healthcare in Northern communities

Everyone in Ontario deserves access to high quality, culturally relevant healthcare services. But for too long, services have been out of reach for many.

We are facing a backlog for care, with thousands of people still waiting for support and services. And we know it's even more challenging for rural, remote and Northern communities where there were staffing shortages even before the pandemic.

Ontario Greens will rebalance the healthcare funding formula and invest in innovative primary care models so rural, Northern, and remote communities can get the care they need close to home.

- Rebalance the healthcare funding formula to ensure better access to care in rural and remote areas.
- Support expanded virtual care options for primary care providers through adequate funding by the province to decrease long travel time for patients and increase service availability in remote locations.
- Expand Family Health Teams into all communities across the province with dedicated funding for Northern communities.
- Expand the roles and scope of Nurse Practitioners as primary health care providers.
 - Invest \$51M over 10 years to increase the number of Nurse Practitioners in the province by 50% by 2030.
 - Make dedicated investments in Nurse Practitioner-led clinics in the North where improved access to primary care is critical.

- Double the Northern and Rural Recruitment and Retention Initiative and the Northern Physicians retention initiative to recruit 230 doctors and specialists to Northern communities.
- Improve the availability of supports and services in French and Indigenous languages and encourage service providers and programs to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the populations they serve.
- Increase core funding for community-based, grassroots mental and physical health supports in communities that have traditionally been underserved.

Invest in a mental health and addictions strategy

All across the province, people are having difficulty accessing affordable mental health services, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made things worse.

We continue to see a rise in drug poisonings in Northern Ontario where they occur at a rate almost three times higher than southern regions of the province.

The situation is tragic and, in many cases, preventable. However, the Ontario government is not providing the resources needed to adequately address the mental health and addiction crisis in the North.

Ontario Greens believe that mental health is health. We plan to make mental health care available under OHIP as part of primary care and start treating drug poisonings as a public health emergency.

For more details, see our mental health and addictions plan "[Building a More Caring Ontario](#)".

- Include access to registered mental health care professionals, such as psychotherapists, psychologists, and social workers, under OHIP.
- Make investments to ensure core mental health and addiction services are available in all regions of Ontario so people can access care where they live.

- Fully integrate mental health and addictions services into primary care to improve early intervention and easy access. Include mental health and substance use as part of regular check-ups.
- Scale up investments in technologies to allow counselors to communicate with patients virtually.
- Invest in Youth Wellness Hubs province-wide as a one-stop shop for mental health, employment, health, education, recreation and housing support in the North. Our goal should be to have at least one in each community across Ontario.
- Build at least 4,000 supportive homes and 6,000 affordable community rental homes for Northern communities. (See our GPO housing strategy "[Building Livable and Affordable Communities](#)" for more detail).
- Implement the Ontario Greens' Addiction Strategy to address the drug poisoning crisis that has disproportionately affected Northern communities, including but not limited to:
 - Declaring the opioid crisis a public health emergency to free up funds and provide focused, coordinated government leadership to combat the crisis.
 - Decriminalizing drug use and shifting funding from the justice system to health care.
 - Immediately increasing the number of consumption and treatment sites, including the prior planned site for Sudbury, and expanding the availability of harm reduction programs, including safe supply.
 - Establishing a 3-digit, 24/7 province-wide mental health crisis response line, and creating mental health focused crisis response teams in Northern communities to respond to drug poisonings.

Improve funding for education and French language access

We know that investing in high quality elementary and secondary education means investing in the future of Ontario, and the funding formula for education has yet to adequately reflect the unique needs of rural and northern communities.

The same lack of investment is evident at the post-secondary level in the North, particularly when it comes to French programming.

That's why Ontario Greens are committed to investing in French programming and services across the public sector.

- Establish an independent review of Ontario's education funding formula so it adequately reflects student needs, and review the formula every five years while ensuring the unique needs of rural and remote schools are taken into account.
- Invest in partnerships with Northern postsecondary institutions so that the North can lead the way in new mining technology and innovation careers.
- Support the University of Sudbury in becoming a northern university by and for Francophones.
- Support the expansion of professional healthcare programs at Northern Ontario School of Medicine University to meet the growing health human resource needs in long-term care and primary care.
- Restore the independent office of the French Language Services Commissioner.
- Improve French language services in all healthcare settings. Encourage service providers and programs to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the populations they serve.
- Provide tools for nonprofits to have French language resources.
- Ensure that interpreters, translators, or multilingual written materials are available in publicly funded services and. improve awareness of their availability.
- Create incentives to increase the number of French-speaking individuals in teachers college programs.

Protect Ontario's natural heritage

Northern Ontario has some of the most beautiful natural places in the province.

The boreal forest region alone has one of the largest freshwater reservoirs and the most important forest habitats in the world for storing carbon and protecting species, and it is becoming increasingly threatened by climate change.

It is critical that we take greater action to protect the places we love and the economic foundation of so many Northern communities. That's why Ontario Greens are committed to working with Indigenous Peoples to protect large swaths of important natural heritage sites now and into the future.

See our ["Roadmap to Net-zero"](#) for more detail on our plan to protect nature.

- Protect at least 25% of lands and water in Ontario by 2025 and 30% by 2030.
- Work with Indigenous communities to establish Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through their laws, governance and knowledge systems.
- Provide \$1B in funding to First Nations communities to support Indigenous-protected and conserved areas.
- Restore provincial funding for source water protection and expand drinking water source protection to Northern, remote and Indigenous communities.
- Work with Indigenous Peoples, other Northern communities, and the federal government to establish National Marine Conservation Areas in Hudson and James Bay, and in the Great Lakes.
- Financially reward sustainable forestry and land management practices that protect the Boreal forest.

Partner with Indigenous communities

In this province, we have seen successive governments fail to uphold the rights of Indigenous people. Too often, particularly in rural and remote communities in the North, day-to-day needs like clean water and access to quality healthcare have been neglected.

It is critical that Ontario act in true partnership with Indigenous communities for funding and infrastructure projects. And just as importantly, it is critical that these investments are led by Indigenous leaders who know their communities best.

- Implement UNDRIP to ensure equity for Indigenous peoples and commit to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

- Recognise First Nations' right to self-determination and establish a co-management stewardship model for the development of provincial resources with fair revenue sharing.
- Invest in the creation of 14,000 Indigenous-led affordable homes in Northern Ontario.
- Increase the number of Indigenous-led health centres and Indigenous healthcare professionals working in Northern and remote communities.
- Make permanent the 50 community wellness nursing positions supporting First Nations communities.
- Work with the federal government to immediately end all boil water advisories.
- Repair the damage at Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoon.
- Increase the number of Indigenous-led health centres, youth programming, crisis support teams, and support suicide-prevention training.
- Restore the Indigenous Culture Fund.

Improve connections to the North

The ability to connect to other communities is key to quality of life. Northern and rural communities have waited far too long for access to efficient, affordable transportation and high-speed broadband internet.

We're ready to deliver on these urgent, essential services.

- Immediately restore and improve the Northlander passenger rail service between Toronto and Cochrane. Provide funding for upfront capital costs of \$220 million as well as annual operating subsidies of \$12 million.
- Establish a clean, affordable, accessible intercity electric bus service to connect all communities across the province, ensuring connections in small, rural Northern communities.
- Make broadband internet an essential service and roll out high-speed access across the province with targeted investments to improve service in rural and Northern communities.