



# BUILDING STRONG AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES ACROSS ONTARIO

**The Issue:** Ontario is home to a broad mix of vibrant communities that make the province a great place to live. But Ontario's communities today also face a range of challenges – from strains on transit and housing, to out-of-date digital infrastructure and to declining populations. It will take increased partnerships and cooperation among educators, planners, employers, government and more to face these challenges and ensure all Ontarians benefit from healthy and thriving communities.



**Postsecondary completely changed our culture, it completely changed our focus. It has been the catalyst for the revitalization we are seeing throughout the entire city.”**

– Brantford Mayor Chris Friel, talking about how Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford campus changed his city

## The background

- Strong communities are the heartbeat of the province. They are places where Ontarians can start a business, enjoy enriching arts and culture, be active and raise a family.
- Ontarians are rightfully proud of their communities, whether they're cities, suburbs or rural towns.
- Ontario's communities are confronting significant challenges. Crowded highways and overburdened transit are costing the economy and keeping Ontarians away from their home and stuck in a commute. Meanwhile, rural and Aboriginal communities sometimes lack the necessary infrastructure, including broadband access, to take full advantage of the advances taking place in Ontario's economy.
- Universities are partners in facing these challenges, and regularly work with government and community partners to offer research and expertise that help lead to better outcomes for all: livable cities, faster commutes, clean water, affordable housing, thriving arts and sports scenes, customer-friendly public services and beautified streetscapes.
- Communities draw from the expertise at universities, often calling on faculty research to inform policy decisions. Universities gain strength from their communities, whose employers, governments and neighbourhood organizations offer vital support to students and regularly partner with faculty on research projects.
- Ontario's universities have a \$115-billion impact on Ontario's economy, much of which takes the form of spending in their communities.<sup>1</sup> They are major employers in their communities, helping create thousands of jobs. As part of a well-rounded education, they encourage students to volunteer and work with community partners.
- Today's universities strive to be more than centres of learning. They are integrated into the social fabric of their community, serving local citizens and partnering with local institutions and businesses to improve quality of life for all.

<sup>1</sup>Council of Ontario Universities. "Driving a Prosperous Future: Economic Analysis of the Lasting Impact of Ontario Universities." 2017.

## What Ontario's universities are doing

Ontario's universities are committed to working with local partners to strengthen both the community they are part of and others across the province.

- University researchers help strengthen communities through work that includes looking at the potential economic and social outcomes of broadband infrastructure in southwestern Ontario, offering the public policy expertise in debates around housing and transit, and helping Aboriginal students progress toward a postsecondary education.
- Universities educate the artists and performers, and support the cultural centres and galleries, that inspire our imaginations and add more than \$25 billion to the provincial economy.<sup>2</sup>
- University students and faculty also regularly volunteer in the community, creating new bonds and partnerships with local residents, and offer spaces for people to come together, contributing their people and facilities to help promote active lifestyles and literacy in their communities.

## Partnering to strengthen communities:

Looking for solutions to its urban challenges, the City of Oshawa is partnering with the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, other postsecondary institutions and think-tanks to become a 'teaching city.' They aim to bring students and academics together with city staff to work on issues such as waste management, transit, digital connectivity and climate change.

In Brantford, Wilfrid Laurier University helped spark urban renewal following the collapse of the city's manufacturing sector by opening a small satellite campus downtown.

For more examples of how universities are partnering for success, visit [ontariosuniversities.ca](http://ontariosuniversities.ca).



### KEY FACTS

# \$115B

The economic impact of Ontario universities to the province's GDP

# \$42.4B

Spending in the province by universities, students, alumni and visitors

## How government can help

To help build vibrant, thriving communities across the province, the Ontario government should:

- Work with universities, local governments and communities to encourage a vibrant flow of ideas and research that helps spur new thinking and develop solutions to local issues.
- Ensure communities, both urban and rural, and particularly in Northern and remote regions, have the services and infrastructure, such as quality Internet access and strong transit, that ensure a high quality of life and prosperity.
- Develop a Northern Ontario strategy that includes: incentives for students and graduates to study, stay and work in Northern communities; sustained funding for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, including funding for research facilities and equipment; establishing a Northern Ontario Research Chair to focus research on issues particular to the region.

## Partnering for a better future

- By creating strong partnerships across different sectors, sharing knowledge and expertise, building up our arts and culture, and investing in rural and Aboriginal communities, Ontario can ensure all Ontarians live in vibrant communities with the necessary resources to participate in today's technology-driven economy.

## Stay informed

- Go to [ontariosuniversities.ca](http://ontariosuniversities.ca) to learn more about how to invest in thriving communities.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics Canada. "Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators, 2010 to 2014." 2016.

### CONTACT US

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