



## Ontario Budget

### **Budget Requests Remain Unmet**

This past winter DoKURA made a submission to Ontario's budget consultations requesting specific initiatives to reduce the cost of living in Northern Ontario's rural areas, namely increased support in lowering home energy costs, principally the cost of electricity which is the main source of heating in rural areas; and to develop a program to lower the monthly cost of Internet service.

The province's 2024-2025 budget, released on March 26, did not address either. A mention of a significant increase in the household income thresholds for the Ontario Electricity Support Program was included, but that change had been announced in the fall of 2023. DoKURA had asked that in addition to the increased income levels qualifying for support, the actual per monthly bill support amounts, currently ranging from \$35 to \$113, and unchanged since 2017 also be increased.

Qualifying incomes (unchanged since the program was launched in 2016) ranged from \$28,000 and less for a single person household to \$52,000 and less for a multi-member household. These income maximums were raised to \$38,000 and \$71,000 effective

April 1, 2024. The province anticipates this will bring upwards of 50,000 households into the program which currently provides support to 210,000 homes.

The budget also made mention of the government's high-speed Internet programs which are aimed at making service available to all areas of the province by the end of 2025. Our submission had asked the province to also provide a means of reducing the annual cost of service, which can range up to \$2,000 annually in rural areas compared to less than \$1,000 in urban areas.

While unsuccessful in convincing the government of the need for these financial support measures, DoKURA will continue to raise the issue of household affordability to the provincial government.

### **Property Assessments Deferred**

The province also confirmed that a return to property assessments will not move forward until the Ministry of Finance has completed a review of the property tax system. No details were provided and DoKURA will continue to advocate for fairness vis a vis the municipal property tax system.

## Modernizing the Northern Services Board Act

The Ontario Ministry of Northern Development is currently moving forward with the modernization of the Northern Services Boards Act (NSBA). The ministry is considering opportunities to modernize the NSBA, reduce the administrative burden and ensure the Act is responsive to the needs of Local Services Boards (LSB) and Northern Ontarians. The NSBA deals only with LSBs and not Local Roads Boards, which are covered under a separate Act. Provision in the NSBA for Area Services Boards was repealed in 2018/19.

The NSBA has not undergone a review since 1999. The ministry conducted consultation sessions in early 2024 with all 45 Local Services Boards (LSBs) to get their feedback on potential reductions to their administrative burden through changes to the NSBA.

The ministry is seeking public feedback on matters which include the following:

- Modernizing NSBA administration processes (i.e., opportunity to align to digital/technological advancements)
- Improving clarity related to the definition of powers
- Aligning Local Services Board (LSBs) and government fiscal schedules/year
- Timing of LSB elections and length of terms of office

- Providing services outside of the geographical boundaries (i.e., mutual aid (fire response/emergency services)
- Reviewing legislated financial requirements (i.e., review report by certified accountant vs. audit)
- Flexibility in establishing LSB rules/procedures related to in-camera and public board meetings.

The following items are considered out of scope:

- Increases to LSB Program funding
- Increased responsibility relating to additional powers beyond the current nine powers (fire protection, recreation, water supply, sewage, roads, garbage collection, public library services, street or area lighting and emergency telecommunications)
- Additional types of services (i.e., property planning matters, landfill site operations, etc.)
- Discussion on amalgamation with neighboring municipalities

**The consultation process is now complete.** The Ministry is now in the process of reviewing and analyzing the feedback received to develop options for potential legislative amendments. Further consultation with LSB's on the draft legislation is scheduled for the summer and fall of 2024 with the intention of obtaining Royal Assent for the NSBA Amendments in the Fall of 2024.

# MAKE THE RIGHT CALL



## FOR MINOR MEDICAL ISSUES:



Call Health  
Connect  
Ontario  
(8-1-1)



Book a  
virtual care  
appointment



Schedule an  
appointment  
with your  
primary care  
provider



Visit your  
local  
pharmacy

For serious symptoms (e.g. shortness of breath, chest pain, severe bleeding, unconsciousness, symptoms of stroke)

## CALL 911

### Make the right call!

For *minor* medical issues call Health Connect Ontario at **8-1-1**

- Book a virtual care appointment
- Schedule an appointment with your primary care provider
- Visit your local pharmacy
- [Click here for the full details](#)

For *serious* symptoms (e.g. shortness of breath, chest pain, severe bleeding, unconsciousness, symptoms of stroke)

- CALL 9-1-1

*Keep this sheet handy, print it or take a screen shot as a reminder!*

# Kenora's New Hospital Campus (CONCEPT ONLY)



## Health Service Report

DoKURA has representation on both the Hospital Project Steering Committee and the All Nations Health Partners, representing the interests of unincorporated area residents.

Planning is progressing for Kenora's new All Nations Hospital. Two of five stages in the multi-year planning process have been concluded including selection of a preferred site.

At the most recent meeting in February, it was noted purchase of the property and developing a more detailed budget are both pending government approvals. Once these are obtained, fundraising can proceed.

Only rough estimates are possible at this time, but initial estimates are that some \$200 million (20 percent of total project costs) will be needed in addition to standard provincial new hospital funding. A significant portion of this would come from federal government commitments provided through First Nations in the area; and additional direct provincial funding to reflect the local area's ability to raise funds from businesses and individuals.

### All Nations Health Partners (ANHP)

In related health care matters, the ANHP continues to work towards development of a local Ontario Health Team to improve and better co-ordinate health care



## The Internet Challenge for Northwest Ontario

As reported in our last newsletter, several high-speed internet projects have been initiated in our region as part of the pledge by the provincial government to provide access to reliable high-speed Internet (minimum 50 MB download/10 MB upload) to all communities.

The federal government states they are on track with universal access to broadband internet by 2026. However, a recent report from Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation (BSEGC), who monitors this progress, shows the disparity that exists between urban and rural communities. This is especially true in Northwest Ontario.

The most recent statistics indicate that 93.5% of Canadians currently have

high-speed internet and this is projected to increase to 98.6% by 2026. Good progress is being made in Southern and Eastern Ontario where the terrain is ideal for quick and easy internet development.

It's a completely different story in Northern Ontario due to the topography. What works in flat terrain simply doesn't work in the Northern shield.

Northern Ontario is broken down into 12 districts. Our area, the Kenora District, is the largest, consisting of 59 communities. The majority are remote fly-in First Nations communities. Only 8 of 59 communities have 75% of households at 50/10 megabytes per second (MBPS) coverage.



## Support when you need it...

The Kenora District Services Board (KDSB) provides help and support when you need it. KDSB delivers essential social services. These services assist in helping everyone reach their full potential. KDSB's services support individuals, families and communities in the Kenora District. The KDSB is dedicated to improving everyday lives through early learning and care, housing, paramedic and social services.

### **Integrated Social Services (ISS) - Employment and Financial Support Services**

Integrated Social Services (ISS) creates a seamless and responsive continuum of services. This means involving multiple areas of expertise with you every step of the way. Receiving unique supports and services tailored to your needs is a priority when working with our ISS team.

*The Kenora District Services Board offers help to people who are looking to find employment and/or are in financial need.*

#### **Financial assistance, including:**

- Income support to help with the costs of basic needs, like food, clothing and shelter
- Health benefits for clients and their families

#### **Employment assistance to help clients find, prepare for and keep a job. This assistance may include:**

- Workshops on resume writing and interviewing
- Job counselling
- Job-specific training
- Access to basic education. Allowing clients to finish high school or improve their language skills

#### **Emergency assistance is available in a crisis or emergency. These situations may include people who:**

- Have lost their home
- Are leaving an abusive relationship
- Worry for their safety