

Executive Summary:

Helping Communities Recover from COVID-19 by Protecting Ontario's Libraries

Fall 2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

Libraries are an essential part of Ontario's COVID-19 recovery

- The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how much Ontarians in all communities rely on local libraries in their daily lives – to work, to learn, to connect to community and government services, to find or train for a job and to access health information.
- Throughout the pandemic, Ontario's libraries have worked tirelessly to meet the evolving and rapidly changing needs of the people they serve, delivering critical services and supports while offering a wide range of resources safely.
- As the Ontario Government carefully balances the ongoing re-opening of the province and economy while managing an upsurge in COVID-19 cases, protecting Ontario's libraries while making smart, targeted investments is essential to Ontario's recovery and making sure that small, rural and Northern communities and schools aren't left behind.

Ontario must maintain critical provincial funding and build critical broadband & digital infrastructure now

- Protecting Ontario's libraries by maintaining existing provincial funding and supporting them through carefully targeted investments will make sure that all people – no matter where they live or learn – will continue to have access to the modern, cost-effective resources and services they need through their local libraries.
- The pandemic has demonstrated the acute need in many communities for broadband and digital infrastructure. Public libraries are an essential access-point for access to broadband internet and computers, especially for many rural and Northern communities where at-home connectivity is limited, and for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians that cannot afford in-home internet services.
- Many branches still do not have high-speed broadband access or have outdated internet infrastructure that does not meet today's needs and the demand across Ontario communities, especially with the growth of online learning as a result of the pandemic.
- At the same time, many public libraries in Ontario struggle to pay for or are unable to afford the high-quality digital resources available in larger cities, especially when purchased on a patchwork, library-by-library basis. This is despite per capita demand that is usually much higher than in urban public libraries.

Priority Recommendations

The Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries represent hundreds of public libraries and thousands of trained library staff in public and school libraries alike across Ontario. Together, we are seeking the Ontario government's support for the following priority recommendations, which will ensure that libraries can continue to adapt and perform their critical role during the disruption of the pandemic and beyond.

- **Maintain critical provincial funding for Ontario's public libraries at current levels** and work with municipalities to prevent unsustainable cuts to public library funding.
- **Leverage Ontario's broadband action plan funding** to ensure that modern broadband connectivity is available in more public library branches in communities across Ontario.
- **Provide critical e-learning support through fair access to modern, digital resources** for the people of Ontario – no matter where they live – by creating an Ontario Digital Public Library.
- **Preserve the proven impact of school libraries on student achievement and success** by requiring that provincial funds currently allocated for school libraries, teacher-librarians and school library professionals are used for their intended purpose.



Photo Credit: Ottawa Public Library



Photo Credit: Trent Lakes Public Library



Photo Credit: Vaughan Public Libraries



Photo Credit: Dryden Public Library



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