

**Ontario Improving Broadband and Cell Service for Rural Communities**

*Connecting Residents and Businesses to the 21st Century Digital Economy Essential for Recovery after COVID-19*

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TORONTO — As Ontario safely and gradually begins to reopen, the provincial government is investing \$150 million in reliable broadband and cellular service. This funding will help create even more economic and educational opportunities in rural, remote and underserved areas of the province. This is part of the province's \$315 million initiative called *Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan*.

Today's announcement was made by Premier Doug Ford, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, Laurie Scott, Minister of Infrastructure, and Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education.

"As we carefully restart the economic engine of Canada, every region and every community will play a role in bringing jobs and prosperity back to our province," said Premier Ford. "By investing in reliable broadband and cellular service, we are helping to create greater opportunity for our families, farmers and small business owners in rural and remote areas of this great province."

The new Improving Connectivity in Ontario, or ICON, program, when leveraged, has the potential to result in an investment of up to \$500 million in total partner funding to improve connectivity in underserved and unserved areas. Applicants, including telecom companies, municipal governments, First Nation communities, and non-profits, will be invited to submit innovative proposals and lend their investment, expertise and experience to improve connectivity in communities across Ontario. The province will fund a portion of each approved project.

"By doing their part and staying home to help stop the spread of COVID-19, the people of Ontario have demonstrated the need to be connected to learn, work, and run their businesses," said Minister Scott. "It appears that functioning remotely will continue to be a regular way of life for many in this new environment, and fast reliable Internet will be critical. The ICON program is an important step towards bridging the digital divide in Ontario."

Access to broadband is a core component of the province's Learn at Home plan. Reliable Internet, particularly in rural and regional areas, is essential to supporting students' success in

school. The provincial government recently called on the federal government to take immediate action to improve Internet connectivity for Ontario students.

As many as 12 per cent of households in Ontario – mostly in rural, remote or Northern areas – are underserved or unserved, according to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

"Access to high-speed Internet is foundational to our young people's success in learning, working, and innovating, today and into the future," said Minister Lecce. "Our government is taking action by connecting all schools to broadband, starting with high schools this September 2020 and elementary schools by September 2021. It is also why we are calling on the federal government to step up their investment to connect the next generation of thinkers and workers to the modern and digital economy."

The ICON program is one of several important initiatives underway to expand access to mobile broadband and high-speed Internet services. Over the past several months, Ontario has partnered with the [Eastern Ontario Regional Network \(EORN\)](#) to leverage \$213 million to improve access in Eastern Ontario.

As part of a \$190 million project to bring high-speed Internet to thousands of homes and businesses throughout Southwestern Ontario, the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) has awarded contracts in Lambton, Wellington and Norfolk counties.

Ontario has also invested in initiatives to improve connectivity in Northern Ontario, such as a project that will connect five remote Matawa-member First Nation communities, and investments in broadband projects through the [Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation](#) and the [Next Generation Network Program](#).

## **QUOTES**

" The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that connectivity is not a luxury – it's a social, cultural and economic lifeline. We welcome the launch of this broadband and cellular infrastructure program. We look forward to seeing it implemented as quickly as possible to connect homes and businesses that lack adequate service. Municipal governments will continue to work with other governments and stakeholders to find solutions that will deliver affordable, reliable access to broadband across Ontario."

- Jamie McGarvey

President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario

" The launch of the broadband and cellular infrastructure program is a vital step in addressing the market gaps that have left too many rural communities behind. We have long advocated that this is an essential service, critical to our local economies and for accessing healthcare and education. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that now is the time for governments and the private sector to work together to find solutions for the patchwork of connectivity across our province."

- Allan Thompson

Chair, Rural Ontario Municipal Association

" Bell looks forward to continuing to work with the Government of Ontario to accelerate the deployment of government-funded broadband projects to homes and businesses in rural areas across the province. While we continue to expand Bell's own Wireless Home Internet program to more rural communities in Ontario, government programs such as this are crucial to helping close the remaining gaps."

- Stephen Howe

Chief Technology Officer, Bell

" Cogeco shares the Government of Ontario's goal of expanding broadband access in the province. We welcome today's announcement which brings Cogeco Connexion, our Canadian broadband subsidiary, closer to having shovels in the ground on projects that will reach traditionally unserved and underserved communities. We look forward to partnering with the government and using our expertise in serving the province's more rural communities to ensure that more of Ontario's residents and businesses can rely on a robust network that connects them to their loved ones, to online learning tools, to their work and to their customers."

- Philippe Jetté

President and Chief Executive Officer, Cogeco Inc. and Cogeco Communications Inc.

" We know how important it is for Canadians to have access to high-speed Internet connectivity no matter where they live. In less populated areas, the solution lies in a partnership between governments and network builders, and we welcome the Government of Ontario's program. We look forward to working with the province to continue to improve connectivity in rural and remote areas and expand service so communities can participate fully in the digital economy."

- Jorge Fernandes

Chief Technology and Information Officer, Rogers Communications

" TELUS invests hundreds of millions of dollars to connect rural and remote communities across Canada each year, and is committed to continually expanding our wireless and high-speed Internet footprints for the benefit of all Canadians. In order for traditionally underserved

communities to have access to the connectivity they need, governments and the private sector need to collaborate on an approach that leverages their respective strengths and uses the PPP model to get the job done. National carriers like TELUS have the experience and expertise to complete projects quickly and cost-effectively, and to provide the type of connectivity that fits the specific needs of a community today and for future generations. Government can design economic and cost-sharing models for projects where market forces don't work, while maintaining a regulatory environment that provides certainty and allows for a reasonable return on investment. To this end, we support Minister Scott and the provincial government's efforts to address connectivity needs in Ontario."

- Ibrahim Gedeon

Chief Technology Officer, TELUS

## LEARN MORE

- [Connecting Ontario: Learn how Ontario is helping to improve connectivity across the province.](#)
- [Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan](#)
- [Ontario Builds map](#)

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