

MunicipalMonitor

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MODERNIZED, HARMONIZED, STREAMLINED

AMCTO's Advocacy on the *Municipal Elections Act*

HARDER THAN EVER

Ontario's CAOs Share the Struggles and Strategies of a Challenging Role

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Published four times a year for the
Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks
and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO)



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Mississauga, ON L4W 4T9
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The Davis Media Company

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Winnipeg, MB R3B 1G4
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www.davismediaco.com

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Publication Mail Agreement #43361037.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
63 Albert Street, Suite 602
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1G4
Printed in Canada.
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Q4 2024

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Celebrating the Impact and Inspiration of Municipal Professionals



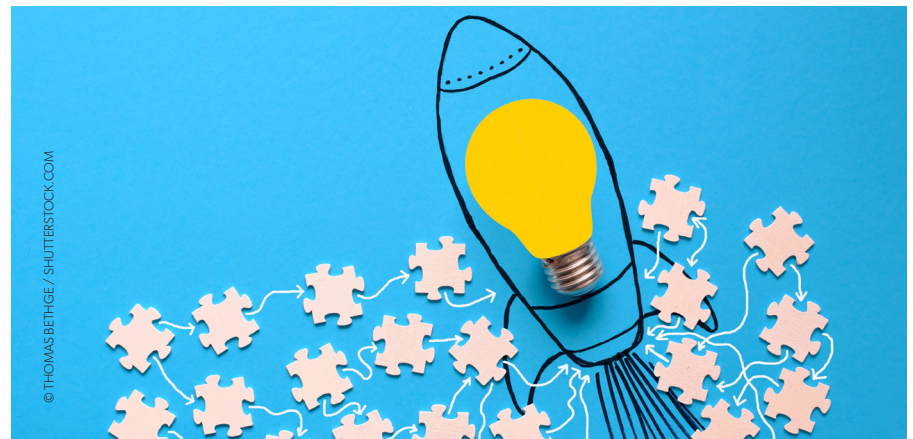
Paul Shipway
CMO, AOMC, Dipl.M.A.,
President, AMCTO

Impact and "inspiration" are not words I use lightly. Yet, over the past few months, these are the words that have consistently come to mind as I've had the privilege of representing AMCTO at a variety of delegations and municipal conferences. From the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to the Municipal Finance Officers' Association (MFOA), the Ontario Municipal Tax and Revenue Association (OMTRA), the Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association (OMHRA) and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), I've been reminded time and again just how impactful and inspiring municipal professionals truly are.

At each of these gatherings, I've witnessed firsthand the immense dedication, innovative thinking and sheer expertise that municipal professionals bring to our sector. Municipal professionals are at the heart of our

communities. They are the ones who, day in and day out, ensure that critical services are provided, infrastructure is maintained and improved and quality of life and place is elevated for all. Much of this work happens quietly, behind the scenes, but its effects are profound and far-reaching. Whether managing complex financial systems, addressing human resource challenges or fostering the conditions for good governance, your contributions are critical to the continued growth and well-being of our communities.

The ICMA conference offered a different kind of experience – one that brought an international perspective on the issues we all face in local government. Hearing from leaders across the globe was both humbling and energizing. It was a reminder that the challenges we grapple with – whether it's affordable housing, climate resilience or social equity – are not unique



to Ontario or Canada. These are global challenges that require local solutions. What inspired me most was the shared commitment among professionals worldwide to collaborate, innovate and find those solutions, despite the complexities we all face. This conference reaffirmed the importance of continuing to learn from one another, crossing borders and boundaries to create better outcomes for all of our communities.

Another particularly valuable experience this fall has been attending the various AMCTO Zone meetings. These localized discussions have offered the chance to engage more deeply with colleagues from across the province, hearing about both the unique challenges and shared opportunities that exist in our communities, large and small. What stood out to me was the incredible adaptability and creativity on display – traits that are fundamental to successful municipal administration.

After attending all these events, I can clearly see not just the sheer magnitude of the work being done in local government, but the passion behind it. The commitment to public service is unwavering. Municipal professionals are driven by a desire to make our communities better places to live, work and thrive. It's this shared sense of purpose that continues to connect and inspire us.

This sentiment also applies to the superb AMCTO staff. Whether it's organizing conferences, managing professional designations, offering educational programs or advocating on behalf of our profession, the AMCTO team is integral to the success of all of us in local government.

This year's Local Government Week, celebrated in October, came at a perfect time to reinforce these observations.

I want to encourage each of us to take a moment to reflect not only on the work we do but on the incredible people we work alongside. These are individuals who inspire us every day, demonstrating integrity, excellence, leadership and a steadfast dedication to public service.

Looking ahead, it's clear that the landscape of local government will continue to shift, presenting both new challenges and fresh opportunities. The pace of change is rapid, but with the resilience, creativity and unwavering commitment I've witnessed from municipal professionals – particularly from within our AMCTO membership – I am confident that we are more than ready to face whatever lies ahead. Whether we find ourselves working in a large urban centre or a small rural township, together we are making a difference – and that is something we should all take immense pride in.

Thank you to each of you for the dedication you bring to your roles. Thank you for continuing to make an impact in your communities and inspiring those around you. In the words of my good, close, personal friend Ted Lasso, "I appreciate you!" 🍷

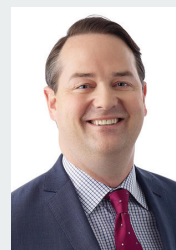


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David Arbuckle, MPA
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Leading the Way Through Transparency

As an AMCTO member, you likely already know who I am and what I do, or at least, what my title is. This isn't a statement made from ego but based on the sheer number of pieces of correspondence our AMCTO team sends out with my name and title on it, you should know by now!

While most AMCTO members would know I serve as the executive director for the greatest municipal-sector association in the known universe, many would not know that I am also the appointed secretary-treasurer for the AMCTO Board of Directors. I often remark

that I find it humorous that the secretary-treasurer for an association, where many of its members are clerks and/or treasurers, is neither a clerk nor a treasurer.

Serving as board secretary-treasurer is a role that I have enjoyed very much. It has helped me sharpen several skills that had maybe grown dull over the years. It has also provided me with a window into the importance the AMCTO Board of Directors places on operating with accountability and transparency.

Written into the Association's Strategic Plan as a guiding principle, accountability and transparency





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mean a “commitment to ethical, transparent, and effective governance to foster member trust and accountability among AMCTO’s leadership.”

For AMCTO, this translates into action in a few ways:

- Providing member access to Board of Directors and Management Committee agenda packages and minutes as well as minutes from our Legislative and Policy Advisory Committee (LPAC).
- Posting contact information for each of our board members on the AMCTO website to allow direct access to decision-makers.
- Sending board and committee meeting highlight emails to all members
- Attending board member presentations at both spring and fall Zone meetings, to answer questions about AMCTO activities and decisions.

A recent initiative, the Board Discovery opportunities, is another

way your AMCTO board is looking to “lift the curtain” on its involvement. Board discoveries allow any full member of AMCTO the opportunity to chat with the Association’s immediate past president and the executive director to learn more about being a board member and about the Association as a whole. Participants will also be invited to attend an AMCTO board meeting to take in the action for themselves! Information for the Board Discovery opportunities can be found under the Board of Directors tab on the AMCTO website.

As the Association moves forward and evolves, both the board and AMCTO staff will continue to look for ways to operate in an accountable and transparent manner. If you have suggestions on steps we might be able to take in this regard, I know that the board (and the secretary-treasurer to the board) would love to hear from you.

Wishing you, your families and your colleagues the very best for a professionally and personally prosperous 2025! 🍀



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MODERNIZED, HARMONIZED, STREAMLINED

AMCTO's Advocacy on the *Municipal Elections Act*

By Alana Del Greco

The health of a democracy is found beyond the electoral process and election rules, but process matters. For municipal and school board elections, the process is defined by rules, requirements and protocols set out not only in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, but in two other acts: *Assessment Act, 1990* and the *Education Act, 1990*.

The process is also defined in other business rules and requirements of

organizations and agencies involved one way or another in elections: municipalities, school boards, the provincial government and its agencies. Beginning earlier this year, the list also includes Elections Ontario, which is now responsible for a single register of electors from which the municipal voters' lists are derived.

As municipalities continue to provide key local programs and services

and are obligated to also provide services on behalf of the provincial government, and as recognition of these responsibilities grows among Ontarians, the health of local democracy will become increasingly important.

Current Challenges

Municipal and school board elections are run by municipal clerks, just one of their numerous legislated duties. Our



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clerk members are proud of the work they do preparing for and executing elections, ensuring that 2,842 municipal offices and 676 school board trustees are elected through processes that run as efficiently and effectively as can be within the current legislative framework.

AMCTO is proud to support them as they do so, through our Municipal Elections Training Program and through our policy and advocacy work. Our members have told us about the challenges and opportunities of election-related administration and modern

election administration is part of the Legislation and Regulation principle of our Issue Profile.

In 2023, our Association established a working group of members who went through the *Municipal Elections Act* (MEA) and regulations line by line, conducting a fulsome review. AMCTO staff have also been tracking issues and concerns from members



Alana Del Greco
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and have been keeping on top of trends impacting elections. These trends include foreign interference,¹ increased spread of mis/disinformation² and the increased use of technologies like artificial intelligence which presents both opportunities³ and challenges⁴ for election administration and for supporting candidates and voters in their electoral participation.

¹ For instance, Ball, Stewart. "China tried to influence last two federal elections, says report released by CSIS." *Global News* 31, Jan. 2024. <https://globalnews.ca/news/10264872/canada-china-foreign-interference-elections-csis-report/>

² See for example Thompson, Elizabeth. "Disinformation, foreign interference threatening Canada's electoral system, elections watchdog warns." *CBC News*. 22, June 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-elections-watchdog-cote-1.6497875>; Bridgman, A., et al. Mis- and Disinformation During the 2021 Canadian Federal Election. Media Ecosystem Observatory. Mar. 2022. https://www.mcgill.ca/maxbellschool/files/maxbellschool/meo_election_2021_report.pdf

³ Deepack P et al. *AI Magazine*. "AI and core electoral processes: Mapping the horizons." V.44.3 Fall 2023. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/aaai.12105>

⁴ Leaders. "How worried should you be about AI disrupting elections?" *The Economist*. 31 Aug. 2023. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2023/08/31/how-artificial-intelligence-will-affect-the-elections-of-2024>

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Election administrators take pride in executing fair, accountable, transparent, accessible and reliable local elections and are always looking for ways to continuously improve the delivery of the important services and processes that are part of election administration. That is why we have made recommendations for making local election processes better for voters, candidates and election administrators through our submission: “Modernizing the Municipal Elections Act for the 21st Century.” An analysis of our recommendations found three overarching themes:

1. Strengthening public trust and electoral integrity;
2. Enhancing accountability and transparency while making compliance and enforcement easier; and
3. Permissive legislation that reduces administrative complexity.

The MEA will be 30 years old when the next scheduled municipal and school board elections take place in October 2026. While updates and amendments have been made to the act, the current mix of political, environmental, social, technological and legal factors means this is an opportune moment to modernize the act.

We can work towards a new act ahead of the 2030 elections. In addition to priority, secondary and long-term recommendations, our Association also highlighted several trends we are seeing that can impact local elections:

- Low voter turnout and acclamations
- Privacy concerns
- Harassment
- Misinformation
- Rapid deployment of artificial intelligence (AI)
- Foreign interference threats

These trends are concerning and require a collaborative effort from and between all levels of government to address. Here is what we want to see from an updated act:

Harmonized Rules

There is a lack of harmonization of local election rules across three acts. School board trustee candidates and voters must interpret three pieces of legislation to understand their qualifications. Moreover, because school support has two purposes under legislation – election and assessment⁵ – outdated business rules make it difficult to match school support to voters on the preliminary list of electors. This list forms the base of municipal voters’ lists, which can mean delays at the polling station. Voting should be seamless.

Rules on campaign finance and third-party advertising are complex and challenging to comply with, oversee and enforce.⁶ There needs to be a thorough review of both frameworks to streamline mechanisms to make enforcement more efficient. This must include reviewing enforcement

⁵ Ontario Ombudsman. 2022, *Annual Report 2021-2022*, <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports-cases-and-submissions/annual-reports/2021-2022-annual-report> p 43

⁶ AMCTO. 2024, *Modernizing the Municipal Elections Act for the 21st Century*, p 13-19

<i>Municipal Elections Act</i>	<i>Education Act</i>	<i>Assessment Act</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing and running elections • Candidate qualifications • Candidate rules • Elector qualifications • Third-party rules • Rules for contributors • Paper ballot-based rules • Enforcement and penalties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate qualifications • Elector qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elector and candidate qualifications based on school board support

mechanisms such as the compliance audit process, offences and penalties. Process matters and so do the rules. If the rules aren't clear to navigate, they could be a barrier for candidates and interested groups. We need to strike the right balance between compliance, enforcement and protecting the integrity of elections.

Modern Legislation

There should be a complete overhaul and rewrite of the act to bring it into the 21st century. It should consider impacts of digital transformation and digital government, including standards for online voting, updating language to reflect the move from paper and manual processes to more electronic methods and changes to technology which may impact the democratic process.

Our Association also wants to see the Ontario government ensure that municipal interests and impacts are considered in the development of policy, legislation and regulations particularly as they relate to elections. This includes ensuring that the local and electoral lenses are applied in the development of regulations related to

Bill 194: Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the *Public Sector Act, 2024* which provides the provincial framework around the use of AI and cybersecurity. Similarly, we know there are complementary opportunities between Bill 194⁷ and our privacy-related recommendations within our MEA submission to update the 34-year-old *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990* (MFIPPA) and we have increasingly heard that a privacy lens should be applied to a review of the MEA.

Streamline and Simplify Administration

Election administration will always be complex, but there are ways to streamline and simplify processes by providing more clarity, aligning timelines and permitting clerks to do what is needed to administer an election.

Updated language and definitions will help to provide clarity to administrators, voters and candidates on voting eligibility. The most pressing issue is better defining tenancy, non-residency and other similar terms,

especially for secondary residents in cottage communities.

Shortening the length of the nomination period by moving nomination day back to July would give municipalities more time to prepare ahead of the election and align campaign periods with provincial and federal elections.

Mandating that school boards schedule one of the provincially required Professional Activity (PA) Days

Members can read about our MFIPPA advocacy in the Q1 2024 edition of the *Monitor* and see the full submission and recommendations within our MFIPPA member toolkit on [amcto.com](https://www.amcto.com).

⁷ See our initial Bill 194 regulatory registry submission here: <https://www.amcto.com/media/2186>



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on municipal and school board election day would simplify polling location selection and give voters centrally accessible facilities in which to cast their ballots.

Overall, AMCTO wants a holistic review and rewrite of the legislation to make it easier to understand, easier to administer and easier to comply with and enforce.

What's Next?

AMCTO would like to see changes come forward ideally by spring 2025, so that municipalities and their staff have enough time to consider and implement any changes to their local processes, policies and plans well ahead of 2026 when focus shifts from planning to implementation.

We have highlighted several priority and secondary recommendations we think can be introduced by this timeline. We also want to see a commitment to a fulsome review and rewrite of the act which should include the long-term recommendations we put forward. Our ideal timeline would have some of these recommendations commence as soon as possible with a new act ready ahead of 2028 when the next round of elections planning will begin.

AMCTO will continue to advocate for changes to the MEA and we encourage municipal leaders such as chief administrative officers and clerks to take advantage of our members' toolkit which includes briefing materials, a template letter and template council resolutions. Your voices are key in conveying to the government that:

- Making recommended changes to the MEA would strengthen local democracy;
- Reducing administrative burdens would allow municipal staff to be more efficient and effective at delivering local elections; and
- An amended MEA would provide much-needed time to effectively manage other tasks that support planning and development processes, municipal governance and service innovation in support of provincial priorities.

AMCTO always stands willing to work collaboratively to drive better outcomes for the people of Ontario.

Municipalities and their staff are facing interesting and often challenging circumstances. The issues weighing most on the minds of election administrators would be better served by transformational change to the act that provides the framework for local elections. This requires bringing a 21st century mindset to local elections to improve service delivery to voters, candidates and the public while providing election administrators with more flexibility, more certainty and more clarity to do the important work of delivering free, fair, accountable and transparent municipal and school board elections. ■■

We are calling on our members to discuss with your mayors and councils how critical updates to the MEA are to the health of democracy and to your ability to support candidates and voters at election time.

- We need updates to align with federal legislation on foreign interference.
- We need privacy protection for contributors and voters.
- We need to make it easier for people to vote and for candidates to understand election rules.

Learn more and download resources within our MEA member toolkit on amcto.com.

HARDER THAN EVER

Ontario's CAOs Share the Struggles and Strategies of a Challenging Role

By Stacy Hushion

Every year since 2016, StrategyCorp has surveyed chief administrative officers (CAOs) and city managers across Ontario to glean the insights of senior administrators on the real-time state of our communities, and to share their strategies for balancing shifting priorities while continuing to provide the services and infrastructure residents rely on.

In 2024, we heard similar themes as in previous years, but the tone from CAOs was different. The challenges are bigger and more urgent.

The tools are out of reach. Resources are stretched to the max, be they financial or human.

The job of a CAO has perhaps never been easy, but today, it seems harder than ever. And yet, as Ontario municipalities contend with constrained authorities, tools and funding, they have demonstrated remarkable resilience over the years, ready and able to tackle one crisis after



Stacy Hushion
Vice-President,
StrategyCorp's Municipal
Services Practice

another. Here's what we heard about some of the challenges facing municipal leaders and what they're doing to respond to community needs and make a difference.

Human Resources is the No. 1 Issue Keeping CAOs Up at Night

Senior administrators are worried about their people – from being able to recruit new talent and fill vacancies to keeping

the people they have happy and healthy, not to mention finding time for strategic HR projects like succession planning.

While municipal HR concerns aren't new, CAOs are finding that current staffing challenges are having a big impact, including on the ability to deliver core services and advance major capital projects critical for growth management.

"I see friends and colleagues quitting municipal politics on a weekly basis."

In an increasingly competitive job market, municipalities find themselves losing employees to their neighbours through intermunicipal poaching as well as to the private and broader public sectors. Employee expectations are also changing. The traditional advantages of local government jobs, such as a defined benefit pension and job security, may not be as attractive to today's job candidates who seek flexibility, growth opportunities, access to affordable housing and more money in their pockets.

Municipalities are rising to the challenge, experimenting with flexible work arrangements, four-day work weeks, secondment programs and other incentives to differentiate themselves as employers of choice. And while CAOs are also focused on fostering an inclusive and dynamic workplace culture, the fishbowl environment of local government can make that difficult. As the level of government closest to the people, municipal employees are more accessible and subject to greater scrutiny from members of council and the public, who do not always behave respectfully. These are singular hurdles that CAOs must navigate to create safe and attractive work environments.

"People who are interested in working in the public sector are more inclined to go to ... hospitals, universities, or colleges, where they don't get as much public backlash."

Municipal Finance Poses Greater Challenges Than Ever

As in past surveys, municipal financial sustainability is top of mind. With limited financial levers and growing pressures, the budget process is getting more difficult as CAOs struggle to walk the tightrope between making investments to ensure sustainability of municipal services and maintaining affordability for residents.

"Money is air. I'm concerned with our ability to [fund what we need] without making it completely unachievable for people to live in the municipality."

For many, infrastructure is the biggest funding gap. Along with the pressure to build housing-enabling water and wastewater infrastructure, many municipalities are worried about being able to proactively repair and rehabilitate aging infrastructure before it becomes an emergency. Even as municipalities increase property taxes, allocate funds to reserves and adopt tools like a dedicated capital levy, it's just not enough.

According to CAOs, and in line with the advocacy of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), a new and more sustainable funding model for municipalities is needed to better meet their needs and those of the communities they serve. This is further bolstered by the growing responsibilities of municipalities as they step up to address urgent gaps in community health and

social services in the absence of sufficient provincial and federal funding.

To be sure, there are some hopeful signs. As part of their 2024 budgets, many councils adopted – often for the first time – above-inflation property tax increases. But with many municipalities now knee-deep in next year's budget process, will that resolve hold, especially with the 2026 election looming?

Strong Opinions on Strong Mayors

We also checked in on the impact of strong-mayor powers, a year after the government of Ontario expanded the legislation to an additional 21 municipalities. Reactions and results remain mixed. Some CAOs oppose the powers on philosophical grounds, arguing that they undermine collective decision-making and local democracy. Others have selectively embraced them, finding that the enhanced authority can simplify the political interface and make it easier to get things done.



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"I haven't seen leaps-and-bounds in terms of achieving their housing targets."

But have the powers led to more housing? The legislation was ostensibly introduced to advance the province's goal to build 1.5 million homes by 2031, but CAOs doubt whether any real progress has been made on that front.

While the feared worst-case scenarios have so far failed to materialize when it comes to strong-mayor powers, serious concerns persist about their long-term implications. Municipal leaders continue to worry about the risk to the neutrality of the professional public service, which has been a hallmark of local government for nearly two centuries. They also point out the inherent threat in a governance model that concentrates authority in the hands of one individual.

"You are always one bad election from strong mayor powers becoming catastrophic."

Council/staff Relations Continue to be a Work in Progress

With or without a strong mayor, a constructive relationship between council and staff is key to the successful delivery of local services and in making responsible, citizen-centric decisions. This year, many CAOs referred to relationships with their councils as "mutually respectful," "supportive" or, at least, "reasonable." The words "fortunate" and "lucky" were also used, a nod perhaps to how quickly the council-staff dynamic can change.

"I don't take it for granted that I have really good council members who support me."



We also heard about relationship struggles, including instances of inappropriate comments by council to staff, internal divisions on council that put staff in the crossfire and swells of anti-administration attitudes. These challenges are often rooted in a misunderstanding of the distinct roles and responsibilities of council and staff, and many CAOs stressed the importance of council training and education, both at the outset and throughout the term.

"Some of these elected officials like to play 'gotcha' — there is less conversation between administration and elected officials and trust is declining."

There has also been a push for the Ontario government to implement stronger accountability measures for local councils. But elected officials can take action today to raise the bar in how they conduct their business and set the tone for the local political environment. Given the growing polarization and toxicity of civic dialogue, the role of council in leading by example, along with the public service leadership, is more critical than ever.

Social Tensions Are On the Rise Inside and Outside of Town Halls Across Ontario

While in our past reports CAOs raised the alarm on critical humanitarian challenges, including homelessness, income and food insecurity, and mental health and substance use, this year's comments warned of a new level of crisis and visibility.

Local governments have been looking at creative models of care and trying to advance their community safety and well-being plans where they can, but they are running out of steam and resources. CAOs once again raised the call for a long-term, reliable intergovernmental funding strategy to provide wrap-around supports and housing for at-risk and vulnerable residents.

"Ask me about a pothole and I can answer you. But ask me when we're going to house a homeless person, and I don't have the answer."

At the same time, residents are pushing back more vocally against the visible consequences of these social crises, such as tent encampments in local parks and homelessness in downtowns, leading to a pressure-cooker environment in many communities.

Reduce costs^{*} with **expert help** and **incentives**

The Enbridge Gas **Affordable Housing Multi-Residential program** offers participants incentives up to **\$200,000** for energy-saving upgrades. One effective energy-saving upgrade is controls technology, which optimizes the performance of the heating and ventilation systems. By adjusting settings automatically based on occupancy or environmental conditions, these systems reduce wasted energy to enhance building efficiency.



Ask the experts:

How controls unlock savings

Find out why Senior Energy Solutions Advisor Dana McCormack recommends this energy efficiency upgrade for affordable housing customers.

What are controls?

Controls are for managing, monitoring and optimizing the performance of building systems. This involves a combination of sensors, controllers and actuators to ensure that building performance is optimized through a single user-friendly interface. Some common examples include building automation systems (BAS), ventilation controls and boiler controls, to name a few.

Can you share any recent success stories?

There was a three-storey co-op that I worked with in the Greater Toronto Area. They had a 25-year-old control system that hadn't been functioning for years. When I did an on-site building assessment, all their boilers were switched to manual control.

I walked them through various options that were right for them and their budget. We were able to help them upgrade even though they had an existing system. They also had their make-up air units put on the BAS and were able to schedule them more efficiently.

The superintendent is much happier now, because he knows he doesn't have to react when the outdoor air temperatures drop suddenly.

What are the benefits of controls technology?

Controls improve comfort, lower your operating costs and have the potential of extending the lifetime of your equipment. Controls are also easy to implement, with minimal shutdown during commissioning.

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You can receive incentives up to \$200,000 for controls and other projects that reduce natural gas use and costs. Our Energy Solutions Advisors will work with you to identify and recommend energy-saving opportunities. The following building types can benefit:

- Social and municipal housing.
- Housing co-ops and shelters.
- Eligible private market-rate multi-residential buildings.[†]






How to get started

Reach out to an Energy Solutions Advisor for upgrade recommendations to qualify your project for incentives.[‡]



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-  1-866-844-9994  energyservices@enbridge.com
 enbridgegas.com/affordable

^{*} Any references to energy savings are based on the assumption the participant is reducing their natural gas consumption through participation in the Affordable Housing Multi-Residential program.

[†] Eligible market-rate multi-residential buildings will need to demonstrate either at least 30 percent of units are rented at less than 80 percent of the median market rent, determined by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, based on the information gathered during rent roll review by Enbridge Gas, or the building has participated in a federal, provincial, or municipal affordable housing funding program in the last five years.

[‡] HST is not applicable and will not be added to incentive payments. Terms and conditions apply to specific offers. Please contact an Energy Solutions Advisor for details.

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CAOs, elected officials and municipal employees have been subject to incidents of harassment and abuse, even sometimes facing protests that have nothing to do with municipal government. The dominance of social media and the wide ability to share information (and misinformation) have exacerbated this alarming trend.

"Monday night was our council meeting, and we had a lobby full of people with signs and yelling ... it's impacting the relationship between the municipality and community."

In response, some municipalities have implemented stricter security measures in municipal buildings, established safety protocols and reassessed their use of social media. Many CAOs are also trying to restore the health of local democracy and civic culture through proactive and innovative community engagement strategies, but this is a long game, and health and safety must come first.

Looking Ahead

Local governments are eager to do their part in tackling the big issues facing Ontario communities, but they can't do it with the current mix of resources and responsibilities they have now. Municipal leaders across the board are looking for greater leadership, collaboration and funding from the other levels of government to meaningfully advance the priorities that matter to everyone.

Meanwhile, CAOs are also focused on their own backyard in terms of delivering local programs and services. With one eye on their people and the other on their budgets, CAOs are exploring strategies to improve the quality, efficiency and sustainability of municipal services in a rapidly changing world. As the scope of municipal activity inevitably expands, this adaptability will become even more paramount.

Read more about what CAOs think about these and many other municipal issues in the full report, available as part of AMCTO's Member Tools & Resources on amcto.com and on the StrategyCorp website, www.strategycorp.com

Stacy Hushion is a vice-president in StrategyCorp's Municipal Services Practice and one of the lead authors of the Annual CAO Survey. She regularly works with municipalities on an array of strategic projects from strategic planning, workforce development, service delivery and organizational reviews to council orientation and training, and others. ■■

ENHANCING DIGITAL SECURITY AND TRUST

The 'What' and 'Why' of Bill 194: An Interview With Minister Todd McCarthy

By Anthony Fernando

At the time of the following interview on October 10, Bill 194, *Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024*, had completed Second Reading and was moving through the Ontario Legislature. Given the implications for the municipal sector, author Anthony Fernando worked with Minister Todd McCarthy's office and the AMCTO team to co-ordinate a discussion around the details of the bill and what local governments can expect from the province.

With regards to the municipal sector, can you tell us what your government is hoping to achieve through the passage of Bill 194? Why is it important to act now?

Minister: Our government acknowledges the critical importance of assisting municipalities in protecting their systems and that's why we are prioritizing data and digital protection in today's digital landscape.

Bill 194, which is already at Second Reading in the House, underscores

our commitment to enhancing the security of government systems, standardizing best practices and ensuring safety and reliability across the public sector. We are equipping municipalities with the necessary tools to effectively respond to cyberattacks and emerging threats, safeguarding citizens and residents from data and AI-related harms and risks while fostering a secure and prosperous digital economy.

Various jurisdictions around the world are responding to the rise of cybersecurity attacks and the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) with new legislation. Which jurisdictions do you think are getting it right? Are these models the Ontario Public Service is looking at?

Minister: I think we all agree that regardless of jurisdiction or party, safeguarding data and privacy and the responsible use and deployment of artificial intelligence are critical in this increasingly digital world.

In fact, AI systems are now being used to enhance the devastation of cyber-attacks and we must all be on guard against that. Government must lead in erecting the safeguards – especially for our children and other vulnerable members of our population, so first and foremost we are dedicated to providing guidance and assistance to all our ministries and the broader public sector. Hospitals and school boards and children's aid societies are among the vulnerable sectors, but municipalities as well must bolster cybersecurity and embrace AI.

There is strong enthusiasm for leveraging these technologies, but at the same time we have to have the safeguards and that's what Bill 194 is leading with.

We have watched what the EU is doing. We also watched what the United Kingdom is doing. You know, I had the pleasure of meeting with Baroness Beeban Tania Kidron, who has led the U.K. down the road, rightly so, of protecting children first and foremost and we're following that lead and leading Canada in that regard.

I recently shared the work around Bill 194 with all the provincial and territorial and the federal governments in our recent cybersecurity conference in Newfoundland and Labrador in mid-September of this year. It's clear that we're leading the country in that regard, and we're being guided by some great examples, particularly in the U.K., to inform our approach. I note that discussions with stakeholders are continuing, and I believe that if our Bill 194 passes Second Reading it will get excellent input at the committee stage, as well.

We have seen several municipalities and agencies get hacked in the last year, such as the City of Hamilton, the Toronto Zoo and the Toronto Public Library. Do you think greater cybersecurity protections are needed? How will this legislation help mitigate the risk municipalities and agencies face?

Minister: I had several conversations at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference with the City of Hamilton and some smaller municipalities about these risks. Hamilton is very eager to share its experience with other municipalities and our government to make



Anthony Fernando
Municipal Digital
Transformation Manager



Todd J. McCarthy,
Minister,
Public and Business Service
Delivery and Procurement

sure that others can prevent and recover from such attacks.

There is an urgent need for municipalities to have robust support from our government in protecting their systems and that's why we made safeguarding data and privacy in today's increasingly digital world our top priority, not only in terms of the framework of Bill 194 and if passed, the regulations and directives to follow, but also with what we already put in place.

Take, for example, our Cybersecurity Operations Centre, which operates to identify and repel cyber-attacks across the public sector and broader public sector 24/7, 365 days a year. Another example is our Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence, with its learning portal, through which we are providing ministries and the broader public sector, including municipalities, with the right tools to quickly respond to cyber-attacks and emerging threats.

I can tell you the smaller municipalities definitely welcome this guidance and recommendations for best practices as well as educational awareness to help them strengthen their ability

to build cyber-resilience. One size does not fit all, and this was echoed in my discussions with the Town of Lincoln, Scugog Township and the Municipality of Clarington, for example.



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Minister Todd McCarthy (I) and Anthony Fernando

Technology tools such as cybersecurity and AI always involve vendors. Do you think the relationship between the public sector and vendors could be improved, and if so, how?

Minister: The relationship between the private sector and the public sector is critically important when it

comes to leveraging new and emerging technologies like cybersecurity tools and artificial intelligence deployment.

In 2022, the 42nd Ontario Parliament passed the *Building Ontario Businesses Initiative Act* (BOBI). This was designed to enhance domestic economic

development through public procurement, right here in Ontario.

On April 1, the regulation was filed under that act and now we have the framework in place to help level the playing field for Ontario vendors who supply goods and services to the public sector. This policy change means, quite frankly, that Ontario vendors should see an increase in contract awards and new business relationships as a result of these domestic preferences. That's what this initiative is all about. Of course, with these preferences come responsibilities. Vendors have to clearly demonstrate how they meet all definitions of an Ontario business and substantiate any economic impacts and benefits they propose through the weighted criteria contained within the framework.

Bill 194 only proposes privacy related amendments for the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA), AMCTO has called for a comprehensive update to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA). What is your government's plan for a review of MFIPPA? Do you view such an update as complementary to the goals of Bill 194?

Minister: I was very pleased to meet with the AMCTO at the recent AMO conference in Ottawa. We continue to welcome input from AMCTO and other stakeholders, as well as Ontario's Information and Privacy Commissioner. This input is helping improve the guidance tools and training to enhance the quality and the consistency of the service delivery outlined.

Bill 194 puts forward proposed amendments to FIPPA and introduces a proposed new statute. So, we appreciate the ongoing efforts of the municipal sector to explore opportunities to update MFIPPA. The expected passage of Bill 194 is really phase one, in terms of changes. MFIPPA continues to be the subject of conversations as we move forward to the next phase.

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There are 444 municipalities in Ontario at various stages of digital maturity. Many have constrained budgets and staff that are stretched thin. When it comes to technology adoption and mitigating the risk of cybersecurity attacks, how do your ministry and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, under the leadership of Minister Paul Calandra, plan to collaborate?

Minister: Well, co-operation among all ministries, led by this ministry, is what Bill 194 and our initiatives predating Bill 194 are all about.

The *Strengthening Cybersecurity and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act 2024*, that's Bill 194, would establish

regulation making authority and empower this ministry to lead the cybersecurity direction – initially for select public sector entities, especially for the vulnerable sectors, such as hospitals, school boards and children's aid societies.

Currently, the ministry continues to build relationships with municipalities and the broader public sector through the Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence and the Cybersecurity Community of Practice.

Our ministry continues to provide advisory services including guidance and best practices and the educational awareness because our goal is to work together across government and across a broader public sector, including the municipal sector, to strengthen and build cyber-resilience across Ontario.

Critics have argued that Bill 194 is light on specifics, with much of the substance of the legislation expected to be borne out in the coming regulations. How would you respond to this?

Minister: Bill 194 contains crucial bedrock principles and specifics including an enterprise-wide definition of artificial intelligence, and of cybersecurity, plus a centralized reporting protocol across the ministries of government and the broader public sector.

We are leading with the protection of children and the vulnerable. Those are some key specifics of the bill, which I'm quite proud of.

Specifically, the bill aims to protect Ontarians in five ways: (1) strengthening cybersecurity across critical public sectors to prevent and respond to cyber-threats, while minimizing service disruptions; (2) safeguarding children's data in settings like schools with stronger privacy protections to prevent misuse or sale of personal information for predatory marketing by third parties; (3) modernizing privacy laws by increasing the authority of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and mandating privacy impact assessments (PIAs).

The bill also (4) establishes AI governance standards to ensure responsible, transparent and ethical use of AI in public programs and (5) enhances online customer service with opt-in features such as "tell us once," to streamline interactions and reduce errors through Service Ontario. Indeed, Service Ontario's "Tell-Us-Once" is an example of how we can utilize modern technology to enhance the customer service experience.

Bill 194 is a priority for this government and therefore expected to continue to move through the legislative process. Stakeholders are encouraged to share feedback with the government and participate in the committee hearings.

AMCTO will continue to monitor the progress of this bill and advocate for the interests of its members.

Anthony Fernando lives in Toronto and works with municipal governments to support their digital transformation.

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IMPROVING ACCESS TO RURAL DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING

Learn More About the Community Wellbeing Dashboard

By Danielle Letang

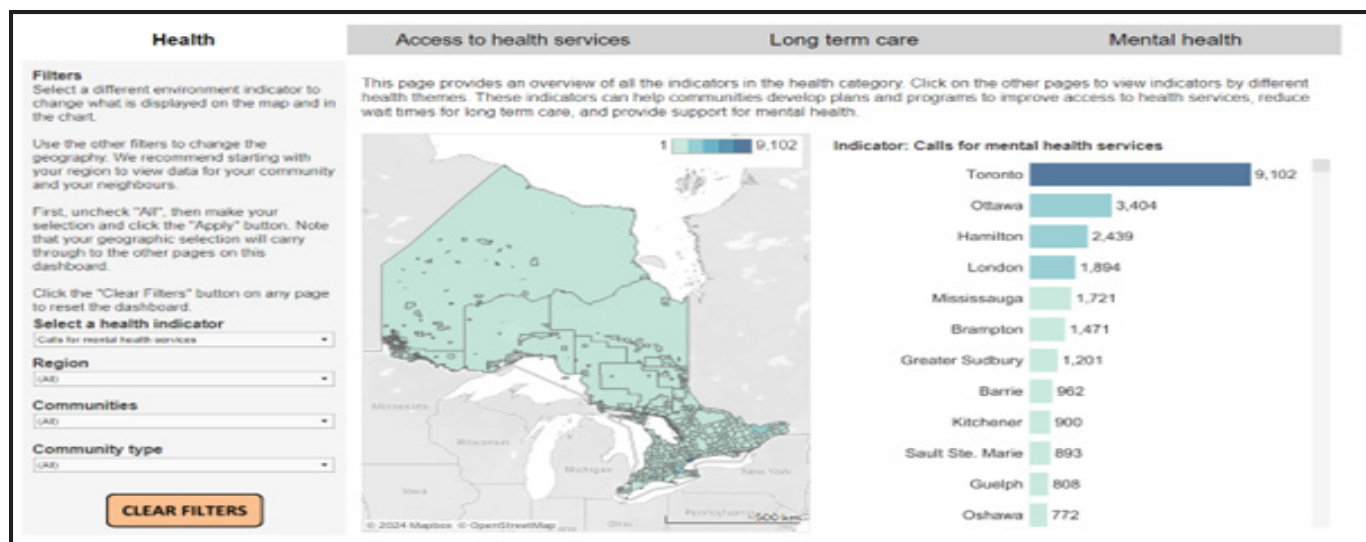
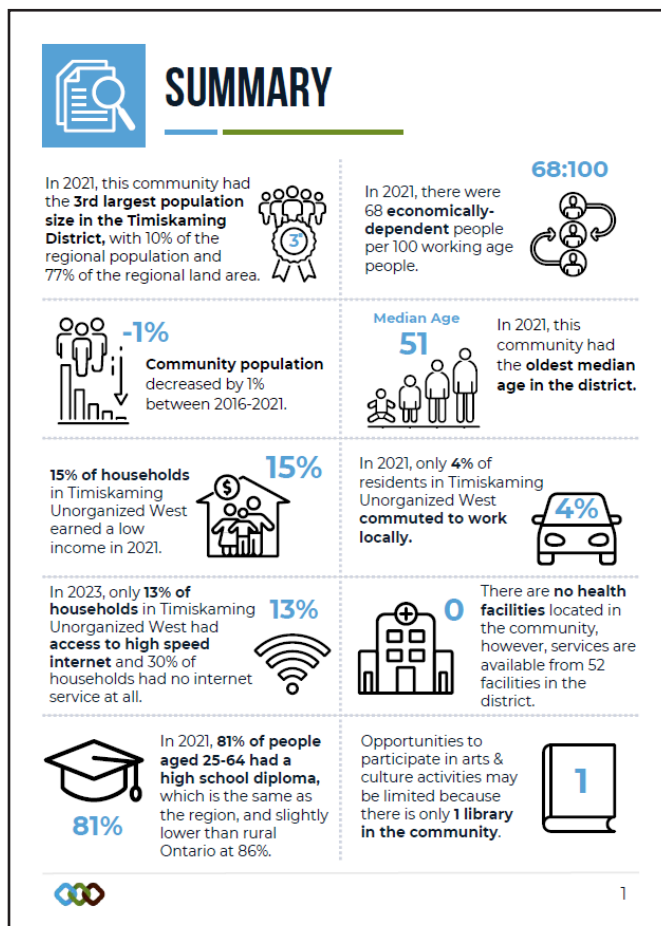
The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) has a long history of working with communities promoting rural economic development and leadership. In September 2024, ROI in partnership with the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness and the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, announced the launch of their Community Wellbeing Dashboard – a unique digital tool to help municipal staff, organizations and researchers identify trends and conditions impacting the health and well-being of their communities. “It provides access to standardized data at the local level to assess quality of life and well-being ... [information] that is critical for rural communities and decision-makers,” says ROI executive director Ellen Sinclair.

The Community Wellbeing Dashboard has many possible uses. It can be a great starting point for understanding the current community context. Municipalities can use the dashboard to develop a business case for policy or program development. Since the indicators will be updated regularly, individuals can also use the dashboard to measure progress or track performance over time. For example, municipalities might use this tool to review community safety and well-being plans or develop plans for service delivery.

Communities can use the dashboard to:

- Establish a baseline
- Identify priorities for change
- Develop policies
- Measure progress over time
- Tell stories and celebrate success

Users can download PDF images of the dashboard to use as simple briefing materials. Data can also be downloaded to conduct a custom analysis of the information. However, ROI can provide users with a well-being report that features maps, data visualizations and easily understandable infographics.



A screenshot of the Community Wellbeing Dashboard Health page, available at www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/wellbeing-dashboard

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The screenshot displays the AMCTO website's 'Ontario Municipal Buyers' Guide' section. The header includes the AMCTO logo, contact information (888 705-8870), and links for Contact Us, Advertiser Login, AMCTO Home, and Service Providers. A search bar is located in the top right. The main navigation bar features links to AMCTO Home, Municipal Monitor Magazine, Ontario Municipal Buyers' Guide, and Advertise. The central banner area is titled 'Ontario Municipal Buyers' Guide' and contains a search bar with fields for 'Name or Keyword' and 'City or Post Code', along with a 'Search Now' button. Below the banner, there are three featured sections: 'Search Service Providers' (with a 'View Categories' button), 'Compare Offerings' (with a 'Find Service Providers' button), and 'Advertise Your Business' (with a 'Get Your Business' button). At the bottom, a 'Business Categories' section lists various categories in a grid: Advertising & Sponsorship Sales, Agricultural Equipment, Assembly and Distribution Services, Associations, Automotive, Banking, Billing and Payment Software, and Christmas Lights. A 'View All' link is also present.

How It Started

Over 2021-2023, ROI expanded their data analysis program and received funding for a project to create a rural community benchmarking service. The project involved selecting a set of indicators that would enable communities to compare themselves to their peers. The initial scope of work was to develop a pilot system with input and participation from four rural communities. ROI successfully created a pilot dashboard and held four community engagement sessions during this time. Early project work is described in their Phase 1 report.

During Phase 2 (2023-2025), ROI welcomed new funding partners to fund the expansion of the pilot program and to continue engaging with rural communities to select indicators and identify data sources. This work was focused on dashboard development leading to the launch and will now focus on knowledge mobilization. ROI plans to publish a report summarizing Phase 2 work in spring 2025.

Key Insights from Phase 1

The lack of community-level data was the most significant challenge ROI encountered while developing this dashboard. At many engagement sessions, data champions were often shocked to learn how few data are actually available at the local level. Data for rural areas are often aggregated by region, or by some other jurisdictional boundary like health units or police districts that may not match community governance. “There are many systems for assessing quality of life and well-being. However, many of these systems are designed for urban areas, or rely on labour-intensive data collection and analysis,” says Sinclair. So, throughout this process



Danielle Letang
Manager of Data Strategy,
Rural Ontario Institute



Ellen Sinclair
Executive Director,
Rural Ontario Institute

the ROI team learned how important it is to improve data literacy and awareness of available data sources for decision-making.

ROI also learned the limitations of working with data visualization software. ROI used Tableau to create this dashboard, which has some limitations regarding accessibility, language translation and navigation. This was the best solution for their project budget, but they will strive to continually improve the user experience and accessibility of the dashboard.

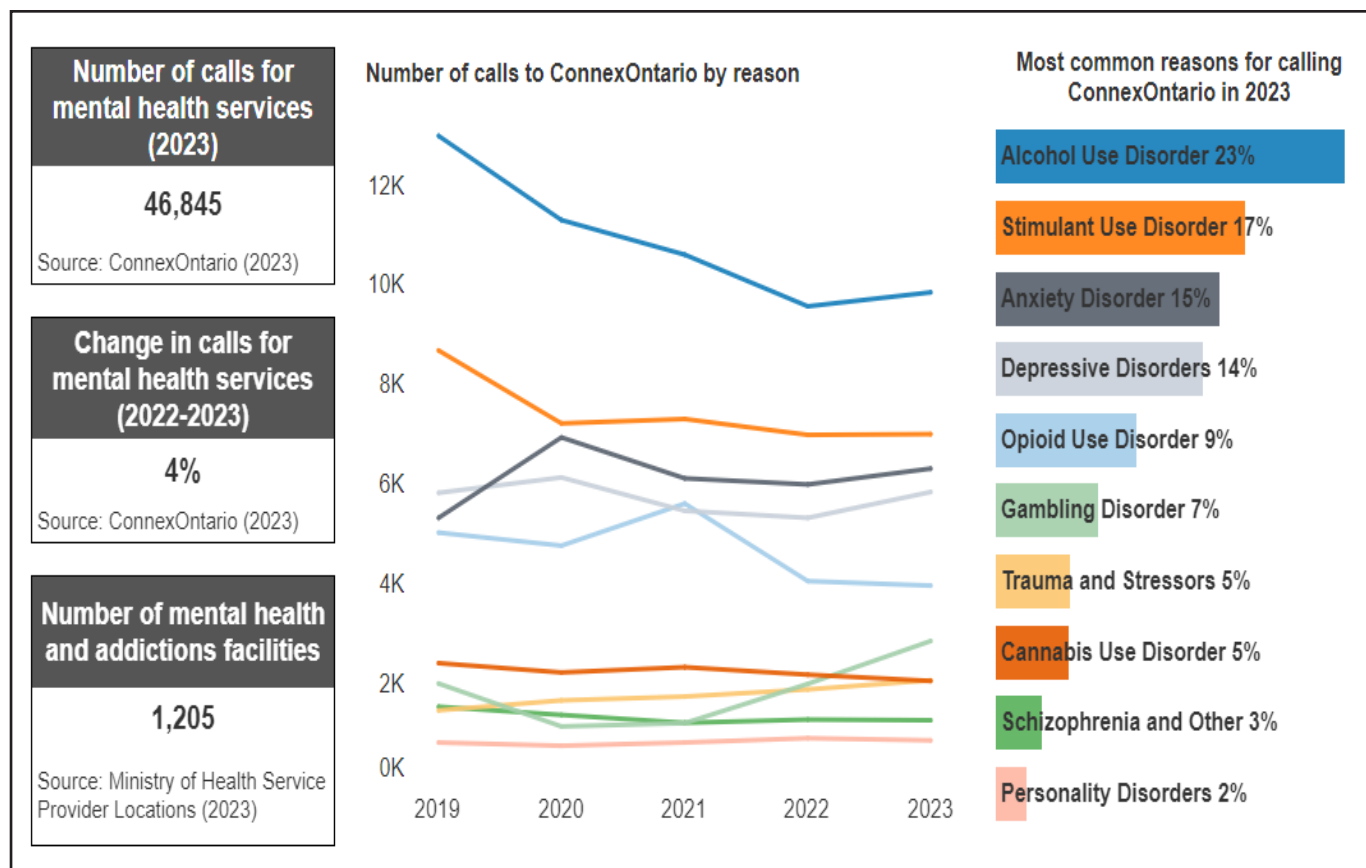
How It Works

ROI's Community Wellbeing Dashboard currently features data for 60 indicators from 10 different data sources. Users can filter the dashboard to view data for individual communities, or for groups of communities.

The indicators are organized into categories and themes. There are separate dashboard pages for each category. The overview pages provide a map for spatial context so you can see how and where your community fits within regional or provincial patterns. Each page has a comparison table with overall totals for First Nations, rural and urban communities to further contextualize your community's situation.

At the bottom of every page, there is a community table with indicator data for each community. The default selection is all communities in Ontario, but the dashboard can be filtered by region, community type or community.

The theme pages feature smaller groupings of indicators that tell a story about well-being. These pages also include data visualizations that provide more detail for the indicators.



Example of dashboard mental health data visualization

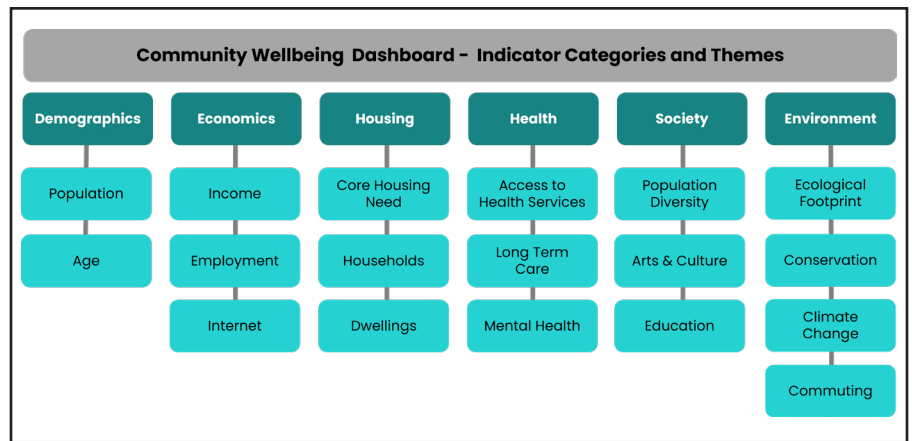


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Making an Impact

Rural communities often struggle to find information to support decision-making. Not only can rural data be difficult to find, they are also difficult to work with. Most rural municipalities don't have a data analyst on staff to gather, analyze and interpret data. But all municipalities have to make the same decisions, whether or not they have capacity for data analysis.

Having easier access to community data will facilitate the development of evidence-based policies and programs and allow progress to be measured consistently over time. The dashboard makes it easier for communities to find information and can potentially reduce municipal administrative burdens including the amount of staff time or consultant costs associated with studies and reports.

The ultimate measure of success is that people are using the dashboard in their work. ROI hopes to develop use cases that will help them know what works, what doesn't and how they can improve the dashboard. Use cases will help ROI tell stories about the dashboard's long-term impact.

Moving forward, ROI wants to mobilize knowledge, identify new data sources and engage First Nations communities.

ROI is hosting knowledge mobilization and engagement sessions to help communities make use of the dashboard and its data. This includes meeting with individuals and groups to provide demonstrations and answer questions.

In addition to mobilizing knowledge, ROI plans to update the indicators every year with newly available data. This also includes searching for community-level data sources or proxies for approximately 30 indicators related to:

- Community safety
- Health
- Civic engagement
- Labour force
- Environmental hazards

ROI respects the data sovereignty of First Nations communities in Ontario. The dashboard does not display indicator data for individual First Nations communities. Instead, data have been aggregated from First Nations communities and displayed as totals alongside totals for non-Indigenous rural and urban communities for comparison and contextualization purposes.

ROI looks forward to engaging with First Nations communities regarding data sovereignty and inclusion in the Wellbeing Dashboard.

For more information about First Nations data sovereignty, see the First Nations Information Governance Centre website, www.fnig.ca

A good well-being system should enable communities to transform data into understanding and understanding into action. However, many rural communities have limited resources or capacity for data collection and analysis. ROI hopes that this project can help remove barriers and build capacity in rural communities for data-driven decision-making and performance measurement. More information about ROI's Community Wellbeing Dashboard and data analysis program can be found on the ROI website, www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca

About the Authors

Danielle Letang is the manager of data strategy at the Rural Ontario Institute. Before joining ROI, Danielle worked for federal and provincial governments on natural resource management, climate change research and sustainability reporting.

Ellen Sinclair is the executive director of the Rural Ontario Institute. Ellen has an extensive professional background in rural community economic development and business development. ■■■

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