



Continued Priorities

2021 AMO Delegation Briefing Note

The Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC) has identified continued priorities, described as issues of ongoing importance that the Caucus has identified in the past and will continue to support on an as-needed basis. These continued priorities include social assistance transformation, COVID-19 municipal recovery, and joint and several liability.

Social Assistance Transformation

The EOWC has identified social assistance transformation as a continued priority item for 2021. The Provincial Government, in partnership with Consolidated Municipal Services Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards, is proposing a significant revision for social assistance in Ontario. This realignment will significantly change both provincial and municipal social delivery roles. Topics explored in this co-design process include a new service model as well as a new funding model. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to improve services for residents and communities, with a focus on economic and social recovery.

The EOWC supports the Province in its co-design approach with municipalities. Municipal Service Manager staff participate in various committees that are tasked with the transformation, and the Caucus will continue to monitor the progress of the co-design process.

Finally, the EOWC agrees with AMO's position on the social assistance transformation and supports municipalities in participating in the decision-making process in order to help implement this new vision, assuming there are no municipal cost increases.

COVID-19 Municipal Recovery

The EOWC has also identified COVID-19 municipal recovery as a continued priority. The EOWC would like to thank the Federal and Provincial Governments for their financial supports throughout the pandemic including: Safe Restart funding, Pandemic Pay for frontline and support workers, Resilience Infrastructure Stream and funding for Community Paramedicine programs to name a few. This funding has enabled municipalities to address extreme revenue losses and cost increases as a result of COVID-19.

This pandemic forced municipalities to respond quickly making financial, service delivery and infrastructure planning adjustments. While the pandemic begins to ease, municipal governments still require financial assistance from upper orders of governments in order to continue to provide adequate services in areas such as childcare, public health, affordable housing, long-term care, paramedic services, broadband and telecommunication services, and infrastructure, to their residents. In short, municipal recovery funds are required in 2021 and beyond to enable municipalities to rebuild and serve their communities as quickly and efficiently as possible. The EOWC would like to continue to consult and collaborate with the Province through municipal pandemic recovery in the short, medium and long-term.

Joint and Several Liability

Joint and several liability has been a long-standing priority for the EOWC. The Caucus believes that it is unfair for municipalities to carry the financial burden and associated damage award when at minimal fault or responsibility or assume fault for another party's error (e.g., the 1% rule). The exponential rise in insurance claims and thus insurance costs is a result of plaintiffs that joint and several liability encourage to target "deep pocket" municipal defendants. Lawsuits are becoming more frivolous and getting higher in claim value. This is often the result of lawyers knowing that municipalities have to pay and therefore name municipalities regardless of fault. Counties in particular have been hit hard with increases as they are responsible for the arterial roads – these roads have higher vehicle use, higher vehicle speeds and often result in more catastrophic injuries. Municipal insurance premiums have increased across the EOWC region by upwards of 25.1% in the last decade. These premiums continue to rise and presents fiscal challenges when our municipalities prepare and manage current and future budgets.

The EOWC will continue to advocate for joint and several liability reform and welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Province. The EOWC supports the adoption of the Combined Model that was previously under consideration and supported by all parties.