

Ontario Party Leaders' Commitments to Small Business (CFIB Election Survey, 2022)

1. **Business Affordability:** Just as people are struggling with the increased cost of living, small businesses are struggling with the increased costs of doing business. Supply chain issues have led to higher costs for everything, which has driven up inflation. In a February 2022 CFIB survey, 95% of our members said business costs have gone up substantially since the start of the pandemic. In our pre-election survey, 90% said the cost of doing business in Ontario is too high.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan to improve small business affordability?

An Ontario Party government will:

- Encourage entrepreneurship by reducing red tape and cutting all fees associated with starting a business.
- Cut Ontario fuel taxes and PST from fuel and heating products. Seek to create an energy corridor from Ontario to Alberta to move towards Canadian energy independence and lower energy costs. Develop a strategic oil reserve to cushion consumers during supply shocks and bolster demand in times of crisis.
- Provide generous tax benefits and wage subsidies to businesses in the agricultural, food service, and manufacturing sectors to employ Ontarians.
- Cut the PST down to 5% once the budget is balanced and down to 3% once the provincial debt is cut in half.
- Spearhead the revitalization of the domestic automotive industry in Ontario to compete with foreign auto companies, put trade leverage back into Ontario's hands, and open thousands of careers for Ontarians.
- Ensure that it is mandatory that businesses accept cash as payment for goods and services.

2. **Labour Shortage:** In a February 2022 CFIB survey, 68% of our members said labour shortages are having an impact on their business. In our pre-election survey, 72% said the rising cost of living is affecting their business's ability to attract employees.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan to address the province's labour shortage?

The Ontario Party will encourage entrepreneurship by reducing paperwork and cutting all fees associated with starting a business. We will oppose any federal program that makes small business life harder.

Provincial education funding will make much needed jobs in skilled trades and other fields virtually free. On the other hand, we will fund to a much lesser degree those programs which are not in high demand in the labour market to encourage students to choose those skills in highest demand.

We will attack the high cost of living by implementing a foreign real estate investment ban, and create a provincial task force to address money laundering into the real estate market.

We will focus additional attention on bolstering local supply chains to keep materials cost low. We will propose balanced budgets and reduced government spending so as not to increase inflation.

We will also work to create a strategic oil reserve to better cushion consumers during supply shocks and bolster demand in times of crisis.

3. **Minimum Wage:** A tight labour market has increased pressure on wages, with small businesses' average wage increase intentions reaching a record high in April.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan for the minimum wage moving forward?

The minimum wage increases put in place by the Ford Government explicitly broke previous promises they would not do that when they campaigned against Kathleen Wynne. The voices of small business, through organizations like CFIB, were very clear that there would be a harmful impact on many businesses who wouldn't be able to withstand the pressure on wages; with the pandemic and responses like CERB at the Federal level, the pressure only increased, leading to a two-tiered attack on small businesses struggling to attract employees at a critical time.

However, we are now witnessing a double-edged sword. For the workers receiving increased wages, we must admit that it would be wrong to claw back any wages in the middle of the inflationary spiral we are witnessing. Thus, we must use economic growth to expedite our way towards a solution. To do this, we must remove the shackles placed on economic growth for small businesses, put in place by federal and provincial governments.

To be specific - we would not raise the minimum wage further at this time. The market always dictates best the trajectory of wages, and as a former small business owner myself, I am aware of the challenges involved with increasing minimum wage. Yes, those at the minimum wage level must be paid more - but so must everyone else. It places upward pressure on all wages at all levels that may not be sustainable on the company side.

Our approach as a government is to attack the causes of our increased costs of living, rather than further promoting inflation by mandating increases to wages. With the workplace shortages already in place, companies will be required to pay what the market demands in any event.

4. **Red Tape:** The regulatory burden has continued to be a top constraint to doing business in Ontario. Smaller businesses with fewer than five employees pay roughly \$7,000 per employee annually to comply with regulations from all levels of government, while larger businesses with 100 or more employees pay only about \$1,200.

If elected, how will your government address the regulatory burden on small businesses?

We intend to do a systematic overhaul of the provincial regulatory requirements - and try as much as possible to sync information sharing with the federal government. To use a recent conversation with a farmer near Leamington as an example, he routinely has to fill out lengthy forms for the Province and the Feds that contain similar and even duplicate information. If the different ministries simply shared information, it would save our farmer many hours of additional work. There is a substantial red-tape burden in this province, and we seek to implement a 1 regulation in 2 out principle of shaving down regulatory overload in this province. There is also significant municipal regulatory overload, and as the province is the ultimate authority with respect to municipalities we will seek to reduce municipal burdens as well. The Ontario Party strongly believes the regulatory burden is real, and our increasing size of government has caused various agencies to justify their existence by placing undue demands on small businesses.

5. **Paid Sick Days:** In our pre-election survey, 80% of our members said they can't afford to take on new costs to pay for a mandatory paid sick days program. In the same survey, 56% said they would support any paid sick days program *if* the costs were fully covered by the Ontario government and reimbursed on time.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan for paid sick days, if any?

The Ontario Party would not force small businesses into a mandatory paid sick day program given the many pressures that these businesses are already dealing with. If we keep forcing these entitlement programs on to the small business sector, it shouldn't surprise anyone when we see more and more business closures.

While it is understandable that there would be increased support for the Ontario government covering the full cost of a potential paid sick day program, the simple truth is that fiscal position of our province does not allow for more costly entitlement programs like this, right now. The Ontario Party will not be pursuing such programs, given these stark realities facing small businesses.

6. **Portable Benefits:** In our pre-election survey, 87% of our members said they should not be required to take on all costs of a new portable benefits program. In the same survey, 63% said they would be more inclined to support a portable benefits program *if* the costs were fully covered by the Ontario government and reimbursed on time.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan for a portable employee benefits program, if any?

We believe that gig economy and self-employed people should have access to a provincially regulated benefits pool – at their own choice and cost.

We do not believe businesses should have to pay for it (though they may elect to contribute as an enticement for employment).

As a self-employed (and often sole-proprietor) individual for many years, I am aware of the challenges of finding benefits coverage for the self-employed. For most of my working career and childhood my family did not have benefits given that my parents also ran a small business. Having a province-wide pool of self-employed and gig workers could provide a cost-effective choice for those who wish to have benefits.

7. **Stay Open Plan:** Small businesses shouldered the burden of the pandemic with constant on-again, off-again closures and capacity restrictions. While full closures were devastating, so too were capacity limits. In a CFIB survey last fall, 75% of our members said they saw a loss in revenues because of capacity limits on their business, while only 4% saw an increase in revenues.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan to put the province in the best position possible to avoid future lockdowns and capacity restrictions?

Over the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has led federal and provincial governments to implement extreme measures as a way of mitigating harm to citizens. However, as research has now clearly shown, lockdown measures have done more harm than good. In Ontario, the economic and societal harm done by our current government's misguided measures has been compounded by sitting politicians who refuse to admit their errors or commit to a full and speedy reversal of their damaging actions. Lobbyists for large corporations had their voices heard, while small businesses were ignored. This is wrong and we must never let it happen again.

The Ontario Party Government will:

- Immediately end any remaining restrictions that have been instituted by the Ford government in the name of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Immediately end any restrictions voluntarily implemented by public or private businesses which impede on the medical privacy of employees;
- Require employees fired due to vaccine mandates to be rehired;
- Pass legislation that makes all business essential, as all businesses are essential to the people that own them and work there, and provide for the health and wellbeing of employees and owners families;
- Encourage sick people to stay home, but will not require healthy, asymptomatic people to quarantine or close their businesses;
- Use targeted measures to protect the most vulnerable, but will never impose blanket lockdowns on everyone;
- Never delegate our leadership to unelected health officials whether provincially or locally;
- Solicit advice not only from health experts but from economists and others to make decisions that look at the province at a whole, not to just focus narrowly on case counts or infection rates to the exclusion of data such as overdoses, domestic violence, bankruptcies, etc. The Ford government made myopic, narrow decisions focussed only on COVID-19, to the exclusion of other real data showing the harms of their decisions.

8. **Boosting Consumer Confidence:** Our April 2022 monthly survey revealed that only 40% of the province's small businesses are at normal revenues for this time of year.

If elected, what is your government's specific plan to encourage more people to not only get out and spend in their communities, but also to assure them that it is safe to shop local?

The government & media created an atmosphere of fear throughout the entire pandemic response, by providing case counts and death counts without any context. Most people (aside from the elderly and immunocompromised) can function normally, notwithstanding the existence of COVID-19.

We will ensure public health messaging does not stoke fear but instead encourages getting back to normal. Government funded advertising and special campaigns will have to be created to help ensure a smooth transition back to the normal way of doing business across Ontario, and the Ontario Party would commit to doing that so that our tourism sector, restaurants, and shops across the region can finally regain some sense of normalcy for doing business. Chamber of Commerce and other community organizations would be requested to join in the campaign to promote getting back to the Ontario we all know and love.

We will also create a specialized "Made in Ontario" branding and marketing campaign to encourage people to shop and buy local, and for visitors to enjoy all the best of what Ontario has to offer.

9. **Your Message**

If there's one thing you want small business owners to know, what would it be?

The Ontario Party has your back. You will never again face blanket lockdowns and onerous mandates designed to stifle your business. You will see predictability, reduction of red tape, and reduction of government debts and deficits. I have never wavered from speaking up on this issue: it's well past time to truly open Ontario for business again. We will review the entire pandemic response done at the provincial level, to highlight all the errors that took place and must be fixed before any future crisis impacts our province.

We will ensure the best practices that are necessary are front and centre, but also that there is accountability for all the errors, miscommunications and other issues that popped up from politicians and bureaucrats throughout the pandemic.

We can't simply close our economy down the way that it was from 2020 to 2022, and we must ensure it never happens again. The consequences are far too great a cost for us to bear.

We also believe that access to affordable energy is the bedrock of prosperity here and around the globe. While we will work to actively reduce environmental waste and contamination, we will not commit to any green-energy schemes (such as under McGuinty and Wynne) that will increase the cost of energy.

We will add no new carbon taxes and will continue to fight against the imposition of climate taxes by the federal government. It is our belief that increasing the cost of energy here, does nothing for the environment, but actively enables countries like communist China to increase their emissions and moves more of our manufacturing overseas.

You will see us as ardent defenders of affordable energy.