

# Ontario's Public Libraries Strengthening Local Communities

## 2019 Brief

### Public libraries are essential to **people and families** across Ontario

As Ontario's **farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource and community hubs**, public libraries are helping millions of Ontarians independently train, learn and reach their potential. Reaching **98% of Ontarians in hundreds of Ontario communities of all sizes**, public libraries are local, close to home, and adapt to the priorities of the people and communities they serve. Trained, frontline library staff are people-focused, responding to these unique needs by developing, providing and offering:

- **Job training** – and re-training – programs and resources
- **Small business support** and community economic development
- **Equitable, reliable access to broadband** internet in underserved areas
- **Frontline access and support for digital government services** through ServiceOntario
- **Affordable, high-quality children's programs** for young families

It's no surprise that public libraries are consistently **voted by people as one of Ontario's most trusted institutions**.<sup>1</sup>

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Every year, Ontarians of all ages make **200 million visits** to their local public library.<sup>2</sup>

Ontario's public libraries provide Ontarians with access to over **250,000 local programs**.<sup>3</sup>

### Making a Local Impact

For residents of **Callander**, located on Lake Nipissing, the nearest standalone ServiceOntario branch is 30km away in North Bay. Since many members of the community don't have fast or reliable internet in their homes or even regular access to a car, **they rely on their local public library to access ServiceOntario**.

Through the Ontario Government's ServiceOntario at the Libraries initiative, **Callander Public Library** staff assist and guide people who need help completing their ServiceOntario transactions, helping both the people and the province **save time and money**.

### Local public libraries **need your help**

**Public libraries deliver a big return on investment** in communities large and small. They've become experts at maximizing the value of every dollar, with an overwhelming focus on providing frontline support and people-focused resources. Through professional development, association membership and the provincial library services (SOLS and OLS-North), local libraries follow best practices and deliver maximum value with limited funds. But many **public library budgets are stretched to the limit**, even though more people depend on their local public library than ever before.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true for public libraries in many smaller towns and rural communities across the province, where the local public library is the main – or only – community hub.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**397** local public libraries branches across Ontario provide **frontline ServiceOntario access**, helping hundreds of thousands of Ontarians complete provincial government transactions and services closer to home.

On average, **96% of public library funding is provided by the municipality.** While most municipalities are strong supporters of their local public libraries and have paid their full share – many municipalities across Ontario nevertheless face difficult fiscal realities. **Public libraries are especially vital to many smaller towns and rural communities.** Many of these communities are facing growing pressures from major local economic changes, aging populations and rising costs for maintaining local infrastructure. Rural communities and small towns also face unique challenges of geographic isolation, particularly access to broadband. In many communities, public libraries provide the main option for **reliable broadband access** and are **the frontline ServiceOntario point-of-access for hundreds of Ontario government transactions and services.**

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Every dollar invested** in public libraries generates significant direct economic benefits back to the community. Here are just a few examples:

- **Vaughan:** \$1 = \$5.57<sup>5</sup>
- **Milton:** \$1 = \$5.67<sup>6</sup>
- **Pickering:** \$1 = \$5.85<sup>7</sup>
- **Stratford:** \$1 = \$7.48<sup>8</sup>

## Making a Local Impact

In **Thunder Bay**, people looking to start a business know that the **Thunder Bay Public Library** is the best place to start. Through a partnership with the **Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission** and the PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise, the library works with budding entrepreneurs to do the necessary research to successfully create a business plan, including 1-on-1 research sessions to gather market research, group workshops, staff training and networking opportunities with the local business community.

With over a decade of proven success, over 100 start-up businesses are referred to the library every year – delivering real local economic development that benefits the community, the people and their families.

**Provincial funding for public libraries has fallen far below what is needed to maintain a strong, local public library system across Ontario. Lack of action by the previous government is threatening the long-term sustainability of many local public libraries, especially in smaller towns and rural Ontario.**

We understand the fiscal challenge Ontario is facing. The line-by-line review of Ontario Government expenditures completed by Ernst & Young demonstrated the significant growth in above inflation transfer payments for many publicly-funded sectors in Ontario over the past 15 years. Local public libraries were not among them. Unlike most other sectors, **provincial base funding for public libraries has been frozen for the past 20 years.** The Ontario Government currently invests approximately \$33 million annually across all of Ontario's public libraries, apportioned by population. With no increase to the annual provincial share of public library base funding in over two decades, **the net present value (NPV) of the province's investment has decreased by over 60%** in the past two decades. This is despite inflation, substantial changes in technology and the increasing importance of libraries as a vital community hub and public resource in many municipalities. Libraries have become adept at stretching their resources, sharing best practices and using technology to make library resources more accessible and responsive to people's changing needs. But in a growing number of communities, they are reaching a **tipping point.**

### DID YOU KNOW?

Provincial base funding for public libraries is provided through the **Public Libraries Operating Grant (PLOG)**, which **respects local decision-making.**

**Under the previous government, a patchwork of occasional, one-time grants focused on funding their priorities – not those of local libraries and the communities they serve.** It forced public libraries in many communities to make **"use it or lose it"** decisions **rather than smart, long-term investments** based on local priorities.

# Ontario Can Protect Libraries for the People that Depend on Them

Increased investment from the provincial government can make sure that all people – **no matter where they live in Ontario** – will continue to have access to public libraries and the critical resources and services they provide. It will let local public libraries continue to **make people-focused decisions that best meet the needs of their own residents and communities.**

Strong public libraries and the resources and services they deliver are essential to millions of people in Ontario – they're not a "nice to have". By protecting public libraries, especially in smaller towns and rural communities, the Ontario Government will make sure that people will be able to continue to rely on locally-focused programs and services they depend on, including:

- **Job training** and re-training programs and resources, helping workers learn and build new skills, providing access to career-building and professional development courses, proctoring accreditation exams and improve their language skills.
- **Small business supports** and community economic development, providing entrepreneurs and small business owners alike with access to start-up resources, partnerships with local Chambers of Commerce & Small Business Enterprise Centres and the ability to learn and use innovative technologies, including 3D printing and advanced programming languages.
- **Equitable, reliable access to broadband internet**, especially in many rural and Northern communities across Ontario where at-home connectivity is limited, and for hundreds of thousands of people who cannot afford broadband access at home.
- **Continuing to provide and expand frontline access to government services**, including as a primary **ServiceOntario access point** in dozens of communities.
- **Affordable, high-quality children's programs** for young families.
- Self-directed, lifelong learning and social connections, **particularly for seniors** in rural and Northern communities.

## Making a Local Impact

Responding to the needs of local business leaders and entrepreneurs, the **Milton Public Library** and the **Milton Chamber of Commerce** forged a partnership to create the Chamber-Library Information Cohort (CLIC).

The program connects local business leaders with library resources, bringing them together on a monthly basis to discuss and develop skills relevant to important issues for medium-sized enterprises. It also facilitates stronger networking among the Milton business community, building the relationships that create real economic opportunities at the local level.

# Ontario's Public Libraries are Working for the People



## **Public libraries help people train for new jobs**

### **Michael, Bonfield, Ontario**

When Michael was laid off from his job, he set out in search of a new career. Needing help to get started, he came to the Bonfield Public Library to access computer tutoring and skills training to upgrade his employment qualifications.

Through the public library, Michael was able to complete required pipeline construction safety training courses that were key for him to secure a great new career in Northern Ontario.



## **Public libraries help entrepreneurs unlock the potential of new technologies**

### **Alex, Wellington County, Ontario**

An enthusiastic inventor and entrepreneur, Alex was able to get hands-on experience and training with 3D printing at the Wellington County Library. Integrating his new skills with his own ingenuity, Alex designed a patent-pending medical device that easily allows anyone to turn a typical disposable water bottle into an emergency eye wash station.

With his new innovation already for sale at a growing number of retailers, Alex has ramped up to create his own medical device company, and has already developed new types of low-cost emergency medical equipment.



## **Public libraries respect the needs of families in small town and rural Ontario**

### **Crystal, Perth, Ontario**

Many young families in rural and small-town Ontario depend on their local public libraries to access children's programs and resources that others take for granted.

As a homeschooling mother of five, Crystal has relied upon the Perth & District Union Public Library to help her balance the demands of raising a young family with ensuring that her kids have the best start to their education, no matter where they live. This has included taking part in a wide range of library programs, including drop-in playgroups, reading enhancements, tutoring and STEM clubs.



## **Public libraries make a difference for seniors' quality of life**

### **Carol, Grand Valley, Ontario**

Like many seniors across Ontario, Carol has come to depend on the Grand Valley Public Library as an important part of her social and physical well-being.

Carol joined a senior's low impact exercise class at the library eight years ago. Not only has it helped Carol stay healthy and active, the group has become an important part of her social life. They've become fast friends outside of class, helping each other through joyous and difficult times alike. It's just one example of how public libraries are a lifeline for many Ontario seniors.

# Municipalities Recognize the Need for More Provincial Support

A growing number of Ontario municipalities and library boards have passed resolutions demonstrating their support for the importance of enhanced provincial funding to help make sure that public libraries in their communities remain sustainable.



Clarence-Rockland





## Ontario Library Association / Federation of Ontario Public Libraries

The **Ontario Library Association (OLA)** is the oldest continually-operating non-profit library association in Canada, with over 5,000 members comprised of library staff and supporters from public, school, academic, and special libraries.

The **Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL)** represents 246 public library systems in Ontario, including 45 First Nations public libraries, in communities throughout the Province.

Together, OLA & FOPL are committed to ensuring that libraries can continue to play a critical role in the social, education, cultural and economic success of our communities and schools.

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<sup>1</sup>Pew Research Center, 2016, 2017; Varheim, 2014.

<sup>2</sup>[Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Ontario Public Library Statistics.](#) 2018.

<sup>3</sup>Stolarick, Kevin and Kimberly Silk. So Much More: The Economic Impact of the Toronto Public Library on the City of Toronto. Toronto: Martin Prosperity Institute, 2013.

<sup>4</sup>[Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Ontario Public Library Statistics.](#) 2018.

<sup>5</sup>Vaughan Public Library (2017). [The Economic Impact of Vaughan Public Libraries on the City of Vaughan.](#)

<sup>6</sup>Milton Public Library. (2014). [The economic impact of the Milton Public Library on the Town of Milton.](#)

<sup>7</sup>Pickering Public Library. (2014). [The economic impact of the Pickering Public Library on the City of Pickering.](#)

<sup>8</sup>Stratford Public Library. (2015). [Under the umbrella: Stratford Public Library's economic impact.](#)