



INDIRA NAIDOO-HARRIS, MPP

Halton

Op Ed

December 19th, 2017

2017 – A Milestone Year for Ontario and Halton

How we are working to create a better and fairer society for everyone

December marks the end of another busy year for the Ontario Legislature. It is an incredible privilege to serve as your MPP in Halton, and I look forward to being able to serve you in the coming year. While it is important to look towards the future, it is also good to look back at what has been accomplished.

This year there were many landmark investments in healthcare, infrastructure, social services, and education. These investments and advances have had significant impact on families in Halton and Ontario. Here are some of the highlights from the past year in Halton.

- The opening of the Milton District Hospitals new three-story patient care building on October 1st meant more than doubles the number of inpatient facilities are available. This was the result of a provincial investment of \$500 Million. The expansion has added 330,000 square feet of new patient-centered space at MDH, one of three hospitals managed by Halton Healthcare Services. The Milton District Hospital's Emergency Department is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provides care for more than 33,000 emergency visits annually.
- Ontario announced that it is moving forward with the redevelopment of the Milton GO Station, making public transit easier and more convenient for commuters and families in Milton. This development includes the addition of 850 parking spaces, a new station building, and a reconfiguration of the parking lot layout, bus loops and passenger pickup/drop off.
- The province announced its plans to create a new university-led postsecondary site in Milton focused on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM). Ontario will invest up to \$180 million in the new postsecondary sites in Brampton and Milton. Milton was chosen because it is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, located along Ontario's Innovation Super Corridor.
- Halton is getting a new 21-courtroom courthouse that will offer a broad range of justice, family, social and victim services, bringing the Superior Court of Justice and Ontario Court of Justice operations in Milton and Burlington together at one accessible location in Oakville

Ontario has made a commitment to the post secondary education of youth throughout the province. The new OSAP provides free tuition for hundreds of thousands of low- and middle-income students. Through the new OSAP structure, more than 210,000 students will get free average tuition starting in 2017-18. That's one-third of all college and university students!

With a focus on the wellbeing of youth and families in Ontario, our government has unveiled its plan to build a stronger, healthier Ontario. This plan includes historic new investments in health care with free medications for everyone 24 and under through OHIP+. Starting January 1, 2018, show the pharmacist your prescription and health card or health card number. OHIP+ will completely cover the cost of more than 4,400 drug products that are currently available through the Ontario Drug Benefit program.



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Our government believes that all children and families should have access to high quality, affordable early years and child care programs. Ontario parents want more support. So we're transforming the way we deliver child care in our province. We've committed \$200 million to create close to 24,000 new licensed spaces in the first year and an additional \$1.6 billion in capital funding over five years to increase access to licensed child care. There will be a number of new spaces here in Halton. An expansion of the EarlyON Child and Family Centres is also underway.

One of the most significant changes that will be implemented in the New Year is the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act. Currently in Ontario there are many working class families that are not able to sustain themselves on the minimum wage jobs available to them. Workers will see an eventual increase to \$15/hour by 2019. On January 1, the minimum wage will be increased to \$14 an hour, and then to \$15 an hour, one year later. This will ensure that people and families having difficulties making ends meet get the support they need.

The growing senior population in Ontario has also been a focus of the government this year. Today there are over 2 million seniors living in Ontario. In the next 25 years, that number will double. Aging With Confidence supports seniors at all stages of life, so that they can remain independent, healthy, safe and socially-connected. The plan aims to address key needs that currently exist, helping make a real difference for seniors in Ontario. The Plan includes an investment in long-term care; the creation of over 30,000 new long-term care beds to keep pace with the changing needs of an aging population

In addition to these incredible initiatives province wide, there have been numerous funding announcements here in Halton. It has been a privileged to be a part of the following announcements, highlighting local funding.

- Halton Healthcare - \$15,698,549
- SAVIS Anti Human Trafficking announcement - \$990,669
- Enhanced Gas Tax: Milton - \$834,000
- Hospital Environmental Efficiency Program (HEEP) - \$ 500,000
- Community Living North Halton - \$153,128
- PRO (Parents Reaching Out) - \$125,019
- Crime Stoppers Halton - \$14,800



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It is an honour to be your voice at Queens Park. This year I was appointed by Premier Wynne as the Minister of the Status of Women. This is in addition to my role as the minister responsible for Early Years and Child Care. I'm excited and honoured to be participating in this important work. In the past year I have been able to meet with some remarkable community leaders from across the country.

It is an honour to serve the people of Halton. This community is filled with hard working, dedicated, and compassionate people. Together, we will continue to make Halton the best place to live, work, play, and raise a family!