



News Release

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“GOOD DECISIONS REQUIRE GOOD INFORMATION,” ONTARIO AUDITOR GENERAL SAYS IN 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

(TORONTO) Provincial ministries and agencies must do a better job of collecting meaningful and reliable information about their programs, Auditor General Jim McCarter said today on the release of his *2011 Annual Report*.

“Getting the right information to help ensure the best decisions are made is all the more important given the fiscal challenges Ontario currently faces,” McCarter said, noting that he flagged this problem in his eight previous Annual Reports. “In our audits this year, we found a number of instances where better information would help management improve program operations and guide long-term strategic planning.”

The following audits in the *2011 Annual Report* are examples of the need for better information:

- Ontarians pay significantly more for auto insurance than any other Canadians due to high accident claim costs. However, the commission that oversees the auto insurance sector does not know whether insurers are handling claims judiciously and paying out the proper amounts, and it needs better information on the impact of auto insurance fraud on claim costs.
- The *Green Energy and Green Economy Act* authorized the government to fast-track the development of wind and solar power projects without many of the usual planning, regulatory, and oversight processes. On a go-forward basis, it will be important that government decision-makers are provided with information to assist them in striking the appropriate balance between promoting green energy and the higher electricity prices that households and business enterprises will be paying for such energy.
- Since 2002, consumers have paid a special debt retirement charge on their monthly electricity bill that was intended to pay off \$7.8 billion in what is called the “residual stranded debt” of the old Ontario Hydro. Since then, consumers have paid \$8 billion, but the Minister of Finance has never provided a public update on how much of the debt remains—even though the *Electricity Act* requires the Minister to do this “from time to time.”
- The Ministry of Natural Resources needs more reliable information about whether Ontario forests are being successfully regenerated by private-sector forestry companies. It can accomplish this by exercising more diligence in its oversight activities.
- In an effort to improve service to the public, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has introduced significant changes to the way many family doctors and specialist physicians are compensated. Even though there has been a significant cost increase as a result of these changes, the Ministry does not know whether these measures have produced the expected benefits.
- On a per capita basis, Ontario spends more on legal aid than any other province but provides the fewest number of low-income residents with dedicated legal representation. As a result, more people

have to rely on Legal Aid Ontario's website and courtroom duty counsel. Legal Aid Ontario does not have the information needed to assess the impact of this on the legal needs of low-income people.

- As a matter of policy, the LCBO pays suppliers a percentage of the retail price it wants to charge for their products. However, if it took advantage of its purchasing power as one of the biggest buyers of alcohol in the world to obtain lower wholesale prices, it could then assess whether paying those lower prices would still allow it to meet its retail-pricing objectives and increase its profit margins.
- The Office of the Children's Lawyer has historically exercised its discretion to refuse about 40% of child custody and access cases referred to it by the courts but has never formally assessed the impact of these refusals on the children, their parents and guardians, or the courts.
- The Ontario Trillium Foundation provides more than \$100 million a year in grants to not-for-profit and charitable groups. While it has a well-defined grant review and approval process, the supporting documentation often could not demonstrate that the most worthy projects were funded for reasonable amounts and that the funds were spent for the intended purpose.
- Five years ago, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities stopped collecting data from the province's 470 private career colleges on graduation rates and post-graduation employment success. Students who responded to our survey said this kind of data would be extremely useful to them in deciding their future career path.
- The Ministry of Community and Social Services relies on hundreds of community agencies to deliver most of the services that its Supportive Services program provides to help people with developmental disabilities live at home and work in their communities. However, the Ministry did not know whether the agencies were delivering an appropriate level of service for the funding they received nor the extent of unmet service demand.

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