



# News Release

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## **TOUGH TIMES DEMAND TOUGH DECISIONS, ONTARIO AUDITOR GENERAL SAYS IN 2012 ANNUAL REPORT**

(TORONTO) In difficult economic times, one of the biggest challenges governments face is to find more efficient and cost-effective ways of doing things while continuing to offer the public the best possible service for the money, Auditor General Jim McCarter said today on the release of his *2012 Annual Report*.

“This Report comes at a time when the industrialized world is struggling with the twin challenges of an economic slowdown and high debt, issues that also confront Ontario,” McCarter said. “So in a number of this year’s value-for-money audits, we paid particular attention to areas where efficiencies and cost savings in government operations may be possible.”

Examples in the *2012 Annual Report* include:

- The number of Crown attorneys has more than doubled over the last two decades, but the total number of criminal charges Crown attorneys handle in a year has barely changed at all. The Ministry of the Attorney General says that cases today require more time, but it has little available data to assess Crown attorneys’ relative workloads or the way cases are being handled across the province.
- Total OPP expenditures net of recoveries from municipalities rose 27% over the last five years, but crime rates across Canada over the last two decades have dropped more than 40% and calls to the OPP for service have remained about the same since 2005. The OPP needs to pay more attention to improving its staff deployment practices and better controlling costs such as overtime.
- Total expenditures of the Youth Justice Services Program of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services increased by more than 25% in the five years to 2010/11—even though the number of youths served increased by just 4% over the same period. The number of staff at Ministry-operated secure detention facilities has increased by 50%, yet the average youth population in these facilities has decreased by 37%, indicating that some efficiencies in these areas may be possible.
- Ontario’s \$741-million diabetes strategy has had mixed results. While availability of care for people with diabetes has definitely improved, many services were underused and others duplicated. We also found that just 3% of funding was allocated to prevention, despite the fact that the most prevalent form of diabetes is largely preventable through lifestyle changes.
- There are about 800 privately owned independent health facilities that primarily provide diagnostic services such as x-rays, ultrasounds and CT scans, and send the bill to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The Ministry should review these billings for unusual patterns and ensure the fees it pays out correspond to the actual costs of providing the services. As well, the Ministry and the Canadian Association of Radiologists estimate that as many as 20% to 30% of diagnostic tests being done may provide little useful information or be unnecessary.

- Many people are in hospital longer than necessary while they wait for a long-term-care bed—even though this is detrimental to their health, more expensive than community-based alternatives such as home care or placement in a long-term-care home, and limits the availability of hospital beds for other patients with more complex health-care needs. However, one in five people waiting in hospital for a long-term-care bed had applied to only one long-term-care home, even though their selected home may have a long wait list.
- Controlling the costs of several multi-million-dollar projects that are part of Metrolinx’s Regional Transportation Plan, including the Presto fare-card system, has proven difficult. We found that by the time Metrolinx’s Presto fare card is fully developed, it will be among the more expensive fare-card systems in the world, with a potential total cost of more than \$700 million. And a one-fare integrated transit system within the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area—a key reason for developing the card—is still not in place.
- The Ministry of Finance’s Collections Branch, responsible for collecting unpaid tax, estimated that as of last March, it may need to write off about \$1.4 billion of the \$2.4 billion in outstanding taxes. We found that more timely and aggressive collection action must be taken.

It is crucial for government to ensure that public services are being delivered as cost effectively as possible. But getting the best possible level of services for the money that is spent is equally important. Examples in the 2012 Annual Report relating to this issue include:

- Cancer Care Ontario, the provincial agency responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing cancer screening services, established three good programs for breast, colorectal and cervical cancers. However, the number of people undergoing screening, especially among people considered to be at higher risk for cancer, needs to be increased.
- Drive Clean, the mandatory vehicle-emissions testing program, was launched in 1999. Since then, however, vehicle emissions have declined considerably and are no longer among the major domestic contributors to smog in Ontario. And cleaner fuels and improved vehicle emissions-control systems have had a greater impact on this decline than Drive Clean has.
- The Ministry of Education has not adequately overseen its six-year-old plan to close the gap between the percentage of the general Ontario population who graduate from high school and the percentage of Aboriginal people who do so. The most recent data suggests that 45% of Aboriginal students in grade 10 are on track to graduate, compared to 74% for the general population.
- We found that Ontario universities generally had good processes in place to allow undergraduate students to evaluate their professors and courses. But the three universities we visited need to make better use of this good information to assess the overall quality of undergraduate teaching and should make more of this information available to students to help them in their course selections.
- The Estimates hearings process that the Legislature uses to review the government’s \$120-billion-a-year spending plans could be improved. However, the hearings do enhance accountability by offering MPPs the only real opportunity outside of Question Period to ask ministers about the policies and expenditures of their ministries.

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