

Ontario and Canada Helping Small Businesses Go Digital

\$57 Million Investment in Digital Main Street Will Help Businesses Reopen, Recover and Grow Long after COVID-19

June 11, 2020 10:00 A.M.

TORONTO — The Ontario government, in partnership with the federal government, is helping small businesses reach more customers through the Digital Main Street platform. It is a \$57-million program which will help up to 22,900 Ontario businesses create and enhance their online presence and generate jobs for more than 1,400 students.

The new program was unveiled today by Prabmeet Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, joined by Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

"Ontario's small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and their recovery is critical to Ontario's recovery," said Minister Sarkaria. "As thousands of small businesses across the province closed their doors and halted business during the COVID-19 outbreak, many struggled to shift sales or services online. I am very pleased, that together with Minister Joly and our federal partners, we are providing small businesses with the tools they need to recover, and flourish, as Ontario reopens."

Through the \$57-million contribution to the [Digital Main Street](#) platform, businesses will be able to take advantage of three new programs to support their digital transformation:

- **shopHERE powered by Google** will leverage Ontario's strengths by hiring highly skilled and trained students to build and support the launch of online stores for businesses that previously did not have the capacity to do so themselves. The core goal will be to help small businesses compete and grow, in a world that is increasingly online, and help them recover as quickly as possible following COVID-19.
- **Digital Main Street Grant** will help main street small businesses be digitally more effective. Through a \$2,500 grant administered by the Ontario BIA Association, small businesses will be able to adopt new technologies and embrace digital marketing. Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, and Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) can apply for a Digital Service Squad grant, which will allow them to establish teams to provide personalized, one-on-one support.
- **Future-Proofing Main Street** will provide specialized and in-depth digital transformation services and support that helps existing main-street firms adapt to changes in their sector and thrive in the new economy. By leveraging teams of digital marketing professionals and talented students, these firms will be able to create new online

business models, develop and implement digital and e-commerce marketing strategies, and maximize digital tools, platforms and content.

In addition, the Recovery Activation Program, operated through the Toronto Region Board of Trade, will help businesses grow and digitize their operations with custom consulting sessions, online resource sharing, learning webcasts and business planning. As a result of the investment announced today, the program will be offered province-wide and at no cost to businesses.

"As local economies across Ontario reopen, we're focused on ensuring that our main streets don't just survive, but thrive," said Mélanie Joly, Canada's Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. "These businesses are the backbone of our economy, a source of local jobs - and local pride. Thanks to the expanded Digital Main Street platform, they'll be able to expand their offerings and take advantage of more and more people shopping online. Our message to Ontario's small businesses and those whose livelihoods rely on them is clear: we're working with you to support good jobs and help our economy come back stronger than ever."

"The global marketplace is rapidly changing, and in order to compete and succeed Ontario must adapt," said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. "By using innovative tools and technologies, Digital Main Street will help our businesses in expanding their reach to meet new markets and adjust to the new realities of doing business during the pandemic and into the next phase of economic recovery."

About 60 percent of Ontario's small enterprises have a website, and only seven percent have an online payment solution. Digitally, Canadian businesses are estimated to be two years behind their U.S. counterparts.

In response, the Ontario government is providing significant support to small business. Along with the [Digital Main Street](#) platform, the province is investing an additional \$150 million in rural broadband which will help open the digital road for many Ontario small businesses. In addition, the province has proposed a ban on commercial evictions to help businesses that have been impacted by restrictions due to COVID-19.

QUICK FACTS

- The Ontario Government reduced the small business Corporate Income Tax rate by 8.7 percent starting January 1, 2020. This will deliver up to \$1,500 in annual savings to more than 275,000 businesses.
- Ontario's Small Business Success Strategy, launched prior to COVID-19, identified the need for small businesses across the province to build or enhance their online presence to remain competitive and expand their markets. The 2020 pandemic has further reinforced the need for Ontario small businesses to embrace digital tools, including having online storefronts and expanding them.

- To further support small businesses with physical storefronts impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, [Ontario is Proposing a Temporary Ban on Commercial Evictions](#).
- The planned expansion of these Digital Main Street programs, including ShopHERE powered by Google and the Future-Proofing Main Street program, are the next evolution in efforts to help businesses embrace digital tools that began with the City of Toronto. Through the leadership of Mayor John Tory and the City of Toronto, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) pioneered the creation of Digital Main Street and laid the foundation for it to be expanded and scaled-up to serve businesses across the province.
- The expansion of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas' (TABIA) Digital Main Street platform and program is delivered by the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) with the financial support of the provincial and federal governments.
- shopHERE is a Digital Main Street program operated by TABIA. TABIA will also support the delivery of the Future-Proofing Main Street program, along with Communtech and Invest Ottawa.
- The Recovery Activation Program is operated by the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

LEARN MORE

- [For more information on the Digital Main Street, go to: digitalmainstreet.ca/ontario](#)
- [Visit Ontario.ca/reopen for more information on economic reopening](#)
- [Learn more about A Framework for Reopening our Province: Stage 1](#)
- [Find more Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#)
- [Tell us about the economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak](#)
- [See how Ontario is Improving Broadband and Cell Service for Rural Communities](#)

Ian Allen Minister Sarkaria's Office
ian.allen@ontario.ca
Kwok Wong Communications Branch
kwok.wong@ontario.ca
647-504-2774

[Available Online](#)
[Disponible en Français](#)