

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Bonnie Lysyk
To: Ontario Taxpayers
Date: April 10 2024
Re: **LET'S BRING FULL SPENDING INFORMATION INTO BUDGETS**

It's time for the Ontario government to provide better information to the public on service improvements and cuts and when its construction projects will be completed.

Budget day is important for the government, but more so for the citizens that the government's choices will impact.

It's a time when the information provided to the public, including the media, needs to be presented in a transparent and clear manner. With finite taxpayer dollars, it's ever the more important that the public obtain comprehensive budget information to clearly understand how government spending will affect them – in health, education, the justice system and social programs – through the programming and service level choices the government makes.

Unfortunately, last month's budget consists mostly of general statements on improvements needed and broad comments on what is being planned, leaving many questions unanswered. It is impossible, even for a former auditor general, to decipher how taxpayer money is being spent relative to prior years on a detailed level. Budget documents do not say what planned spending will accomplish in the short, medium and long term, and whether that will meet the public's needs.

How will the government address identified public service gaps, program waiting lists, health service wait times, school class sizes, deferred capital maintenance expenditures, etc.?

In Ontario, and this year is no exception, budget material has typically focused on the discussion of revenues, expenses, capital investments, economic indicators and general plans presented in charts and narrative form. This has sufficed for many years. Is this still sufficient? In my opinion, no longer. Taxpayer dollars are being stretched and are needed for increasingly diverse programs and expanding service levels and capital investments.

One only needs to look to British Columbia's budget package to see enhanced public reporting that includes service delivery plans for each ministry and agency. This includes goals, objectives, strategic plans and performance measures with targets. For example, B.C.'s 2024 budget disclosed the total operating room hours expected to be available based on the funds provided. For capital expenditures, the documents are clear on what is being built, with planned completion dates, and projected final costs.

By providing this more detailed information, the government has accepted accountability for choices and deadlines. While I'm sure there is room for improvement in this process, B.C. budget documents provide more information and clarity compared to Ontario's traditional material.

Ontario's budget said: "Ontario's Plan to Build includes the most ambitious capital plan in the province's history, with \$190.2 billion over the next decade to support growing business, families and newcomers." Expected in-service dates and projected costs for each major project over a certain threshold would provide a reader with fuller information. In another section, the budget states that "Ontario's plan includes supporting more than 50 hospital projects that would add approximately 3,000 new beds over 10 years." Do we know whether this is sufficient to address present healthcare concerns?

Last June, I tabled What Gets Measured, Gets Managed, a [report](#) with a number of recommendations that need to be addressed before Ontario can advance to incorporating projected performance levels in its budget documents. I remain hopeful that the future will see this evolution. As the saying goes, "All things are difficult before they are easy."

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