

**Ontario Helps People Impacted by COVID-19 Get Back to Work***New Programs Focus on Hospitality Workers and Apprentices*

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TORONTO — As the economy gradually reopens, the Ontario government is helping people affected by COVID-19 get back to work. The province is investing in Ontario's first Virtual Action Centre, an online counselling and training portal, to support laid off and unemployed hospitality workers, and is helping apprentices by providing grants to purchase tools, protective equipment and clothing for their trade, along with forgiving previous loans to purchase tools.

The announcement was made today by Premier Doug Ford, Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, and Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

"The impact of COVID-19 has been devastating for many business owners, workers, and families, and that's why we are doing everything we can to help people through this difficult period," said Premier Ford. "Hospitality workers and our skilled tradespeople have been among those hardest hit by this pandemic. These new programs will ensure they're ready to get back on the job and play an important role in our economic recovery."

The government is providing an Ontario Tools Grant of \$2.5 million in 2020-21 and \$7.5 million in 2021-22 and ongoing. This will help new eligible apprentices purchase the equipment they need to start their careers. The funding amounts will be distributed as follows:

- \$1,000 for those in motive power sector trades;
- \$600 for those in construction and industrial sector trades;
- \$400 for those in service sector trades.

To be eligible for the new grant, apprentices must have:

- completed level 1 training on or after April 1, 2020;
- an active registered training agreement; and
- been registered as an apprentice for at least 12 months.

The government is also forgiving more than \$10 million in outstanding loans owed by apprentices for tool purchases made at the beginning of their careers. The Loans for Tools Program allowed thousands of new apprentices to buy tools, equipment, clothing, manuals and code books required for their trade. About 19,000 apprentices who participated in the program owed, on average, \$495.

"If we are going to rebuild our economy, we must reach out and help the workers and businesses that are suffering as a result of COVID-19," said Minister McNaughton. "The programs that we are announcing today will leave more money in the pockets of our apprentices and support those hospitality workers who have been laid-off by providing access to the training and services they need to recover and rejoin the workforce."

The government is also investing nearly \$2 million to open a Virtual Action Centre in partnership with UNITE HERE Local 75. This virtual job training resource will provide up to 7,000 unemployed workers in the hospitality sector with access to a wide range of services and supports online and over the phone, including:

- Stress management and mental health resources through video conferencing;
- Immediate health and safety online training for workers who return to work at designated quarantined sites;
- Technical skills online training;
- Online training to upgrade English language and digital skills;
- Peer group facilitation and employment preparation through videoconferencing.

UNITE HERE will operate the Virtual Action Centre. UNITE HERE is a union that represents workers in hotels, restaurants, racetracks and casinos, laundry and food service companies, airport concessions and apparel, textile and general manufacturing and distribution centers.

"Ontario's hotel and hospitality sectors create thousands of jobs across the province," said Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. "This new virtual platform will make sure that those workers are supported as we gradually reopen the province and prepare our \$35 billion tourism sector to welcome visitors back."

"We are very grateful for the generous support of the Ontario government," said Guled Warsame, President of UNITE HERE Local 75. "This support will provide services and skills training to our members who are laid-off due to COVID-19. We know that people are at the heart of the hospitality industry. We are very grateful and proud to work with the provincial government to ensure that people are provided with support and the opportunity to upgrade their skills and get back to work as soon as possible."

## **LEARN MORE**

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