

## Skilled trades shortage could undermine home construction in Ontario

by Richard Lyall on 02 Jun 2021



The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a significant toll on our apprenticeship system and heightened the risk that there may not be enough certified journeypersons in several trades a decade down the road.

Construction trades such as bricklayers, boilermakers and welders are simply not training enough apprentices to meet the demand in Ontario and nationally, according to data in a new labour market information report that was released recently by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF).

The report, titled *Apprentice Demand in Red Seal Trades: A 2021 National Labour Market Information Report*, was done by Prism Economics and Analysis and draws on apprenticeship trends data and projections to provide a forward-looking assessment of demand and supply for trade certification.

Between 2021 and 2030, it's anticipated Ontario will need 1,378 new certified bricklayers but only 545 are expected to complete their training. Ontario will require 3,630 new welders in the same period but only 610 are expected to become certified, while 850 boilermakers are needed but only 636 will likely receive certification.

According to the report, the pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to Canada's apprenticeship system, as mandated shutdowns and social distancing measures created new administrative challenges and imposed many obstacles to the delivery of in-school training, testing and certification.

Ontario's construction and maintenance industry will need to hire and train nearly 104,000 additional workers over the next 10 years to keep pace because the industry is growing, and baby boomers are retiring.

Contractors are already anticipating problems. A survey by the Ontario Construction Secretariat found that 56% of contractors expect to have greater difficulty accessing skilled labour in 2021.

Construction is the backbone of our economy. Housing's share of the country's GDP, for example, spiked to a record 9.3% in the final quarter of last year—double the historical norm and up sharply from 7.5% a year earlier. It is critically important that the industry not be derailed.

The recent figures, however, indicate that a labour shortage in certain trades could jeopardize that recovery.

The provincial government is taking steps to address the problem in Ontario with the announcement of the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act which will establish a Crown agency called Skilled Trades Ontario that will replace the embattled Ontario College of Trades.

The long-awaited legislation was introduced recently by Labour, Training and Skills Development Minister Monte McNaughton to help apprentices prepare for in-demand jobs and complete their training faster. It will make the system more accessible to apprentices and much easier to navigate.

The agency will create a clearer pathway for youth interested in pursuing an apprenticeship, work to end the stigma around careers in construction, and simplify the apprenticeship system from start to finish.

The idea is to provide a one-stop-shop for apprentices, employers, and journeypeople. It will handle apprentice registrations, develop training standards, and issue certificates and licences to trades. Research will be conducted into the skilled trades and apprenticeships by the agency so that the province and employers will be able to anticipate what trades will be most needed down the road.

The agency has the support of RESCON and homebuilders and several industry heavyweights such as LiUNA, the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario, and Merit Ontario.

RESCON and members of the homebuilding community have been waiting for this new agency to be announced for some time now and we're looking forward to working with the government to make it reality.

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