



**CONSUMER
PROTECTION
ONTARIO**



A NEWCOMER'S INTRODUCTION TO
**CONSUMER
PROTECTION IN ONTARIO**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1:

| | |
|---|----------|
| GENERAL CONSUMER INFORMATION | 4 |
| Be a smart consumer..... | 4 |
| Know your rights as a consumer..... | 5 |
| Ways to shop..... | 8 |
| What are you buying? | 10 |

SECTION 2:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| MONEY AND FINANCES | 16 |
| Protect yourself from scams and frauds..... | 16 |
| Common money scams..... | 17 |
| Identity theft..... | 20 |
| Debt issues..... | 22 |
| Sending money overseas (“remittances”)..... | 28 |



SECTION 3:
FINDING A PLACE TO LIVE 30

 Buying a home..... 30

 Moving..... 34

SECTION 4:
GETTING AROUND 36

 Renting a car 36

 Buying a car..... 37

 Leasing a car 39

 Car insurance..... 40

 On the road..... 41

 Getting towed 42

 Parking 44

 Travelling..... 46

SECTION 5:
FURTHER INFORMATION..... 48

 Reference list 48



Helpful sources

In this guide you will find directions on how to search for helpful sources of information designed to assist newcomers in all aspects of life in Ontario.

Consumer Protection Ontario
ontario.ca/consumerprotection

SECTION 1: GENERAL CONSUMER INFORMATION

➔ BE A SMART CONSUMER

Every time you buy or rent something – a small and everyday item, or something large and expensive – you are making choices as a consumer.

Most of the time, businesses treat consumers fairly, and sell goods and services that provide the value promised.

However, some businesses operate in ways that are dishonest, and try to take advantage of the consumer.

Knowing how to protect yourself against dishonest practices can help you save money and avoid being disappointed or becoming the victim of a fraud or scam.

This guide is produced by **Consumer Protection Ontario** to provide newcomers with the information they need to know when they are buying products and services. Throughout this guide, you will find examples of questions that you can ask a business or supplier to help you become a smart consumer.

Consumer Protection Ontario is an awareness program from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and other public organizations that promote consumer rights and public safety.

➔ KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AS A CONSUMER

The **Consumer Protection Act, 2002** is the law that covers many of the things you are going to buy or rent in Ontario. It is meant to make things fair for everyone – consumers and businesses.

PREVENTING UNFAIR PRACTICES

In Ontario, businesses are not allowed to act unfairly towards consumers. They cannot give you false or misleading information. For example, it is against the law for a business to make a claim about a product or service that is not true.

Companies also cannot knowingly take advantage of a consumer. For example, a company is not allowed to have people whose first language is not English, sign complicated contracts that they do not understand. A business is also breaking the law if it is taking money for services that it knows a customer cannot afford.

Here are steps you can take if you think a company has been unfair to you:

- 1 Complain to the business in writing.
- 2 Keep proof that the letter was sent. (Send it by registered mail and keep the receipt, or by fax and hold on to the confirmation sheet).
- 3 Keep records of all communication with the business.
- 4 Give the company about 10 – 15 business days to answer your concerns.

Consumer Protection Ontario is here to assist you. On our website (Ontario.ca/consumerprotection), you will find a sample complaint letter that you can send to a business. You will also find tips on how to resolve a disagreement. In the end, if you are still not satisfied with how the company has responded, you can file a formal complaint along with all the relevant documents (receipts, contracts, copies of letters) with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.



Visit the **How to File a Complaint** section of our website for more information.



Getting settled

As a newcomer, you likely have many questions about getting settled and starting your new life in Ontario. You need information about acquiring necessary documents, finding a place to live, registering your children in school and getting employment, to name just a few. This guide is not intended to provide answers on everything you need to know about getting settled, living and working in Ontario. But at various points in the guide we have included some helpful links to help answer general questions you may have about starting your new life in Ontario.

“Orientation to Ontario,” a resource created by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, is a good starting point for useful information about moving to and settling in Ontario.

For more information visit:
orientationontario.ca

Consumer Protection Ontario
ontario.ca/consumerprotection



What is a contract for products and services?

A contract is an agreement where one person receives a product or service from a business or supplier in exchange for payment. For example, when you hire a mover or buy clothing on a website you enter into a contract.



This guide uses the terms “**supplier**”, “**company**” and “**business**” interchangeably, to refer to the entity that sells products and services to consumers.

CONTRACTS



Ontario consumer law requires written contracts for certain products and services. For example, you must be given a written contract if you are spending more than \$50 to:

- Buy something at home from a salesperson who comes to your door.
- Get a magazine subscription.
- Hire a business to move your furniture.

A contract must include specific information. The language used must also be easy to understand. If there is a dispute between a consumer and a business about the meaning of a contract, the law says that a court should give preference to the consumer.



Buy a service or product



Costs more than \$50.00



Need a written Contract

FUTURE PERFORMANCE CONTRACTS

Are you ordering something that has a future delivery date, after you have paid for it? This is an example of a “future performance agreement”. This means you prepay for your products or services before you get them. Examples of this type of agreement include property maintenance or Internet services. This agreement must contain:

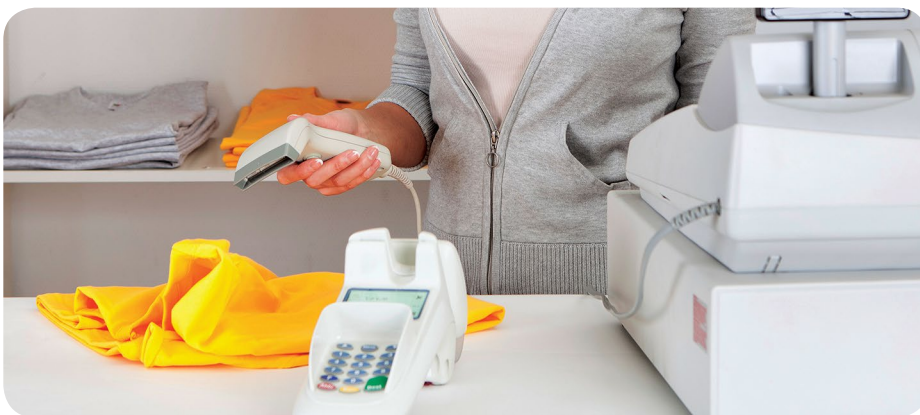
- Complete details of the terms of the transaction (such as what you and the business are agreeing to).
- All information about the credit terms (for example, the delivery date, length of contract, interest rates, etc.).

COOLING-OFF PERIOD

The rules in Ontario also give a consumer time to change his or her mind, and back out of a contract in certain situations. This is called a cooling-off period. Examples of when you are given time to cancel a contract are when you:

- Buy something from a salesperson who comes to your door.
- Join a fitness club or gym.
- Buy a newly built condo.

GETTING A REFUND OR EXCHANGE



For many things you buy, the law does not require companies to give refunds and/or exchanges if you are not satisfied with your purchase or you change your mind. So, it is important to make sure you ask **before** you buy something if the business has a written policy about refunds and exchanges. This way you will not end up with something you do not really want.



Ask the right questions before you buy a product:

- If I want to return the product, can I get all or some of my money back, or do I only get to exchange it and choose something else?
- Is there a time limit for returning the product?
- Are there any items that cannot be returned?
- What “proof of purchase” do I need to return the product (for example a receipt or a signed contract)?



Search for “**Refunds and exchanges**” on our website for more information.



Be a smart consumer

Part of being a smart consumer means “getting it in writing”. Get receipts that show how you paid for what you bought.



Newcomer services

Learn more about newcomer services in your community by visiting: settlement.org

→ WAYS TO SHOP

BUYING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IN STORES

- Research the product or service before you buy to compare quality and prices.
- Get information in writing such as estimates for services, delivery dates etc. and keep your receipts and paperwork (warranties).
- Beware of sales pitches that offer “cash deals” to avoid paying sales tax. Always get a receipt. In Ontario, it is against the law for a company to avoid charging you sales tax on a purchase.
- Without a receipt:
 - You do not have any proof of purchase.
 - You cannot claim your warranty if your item breaks down or fails to do what was promised.
 - It is more difficult to get help from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, or to make a convincing case in court, if you do not have proof of purchase.



Search for “**Shopping in Ontario**” on our website for more information.

ONLINE SHOPPING

More and more people are buying products through the Internet. Another term for this is “online shopping.”

Make sure you print or save all contracts and receipts for your protection. If you have a problem, you will need them as “proof of purchase”. You should also ensure that your credit card number and personal financial information (such as passwords, user names, etc.) are being sent over a secure and protected website and server. Responsible businesses usually advertise this fact. A secure website will begin with the letters “**https**”.



Ask the right questions when you are shopping online:

- Does the company’s website provide basic information (the seller’s name and contact information for the business such as address and phone number)?
- Do I know what I am paying for? Appropriate product information should be provided (for example, information on size, materials or colour options and warranties or guarantees).

- If I am shopping on a site from a country other than Canada, what currency am I paying in and how much more will I end up paying because of exchange rates, customs and duties, and shipping fees?
- Have I read the whole contract? The terms and conditions of the agreement and refund or exchange policies should be set out.
- Does the email address look strange or unfamiliar? Be careful because it may be a scam trying to get you to reveal your credit card number and other personal information.



Search for “**Shopping online**” on our website for more information.

BUYING FROM A SALESPERSON AT YOUR DOOR

Buying products and services from someone who comes to your door can be risky. It is sometimes difficult to know if a door-to-door salesperson can be trusted or if the individual represents a legitimate business, if you have not had time to do any research. Make sure you consider each situation carefully before signing any type of contract.

If you have signed a contract at the door and it is worth more than \$50, you have the right to cancel within 10 days and the business has 15 days to return your money. The best way to cancel is by registered mail or fax.

Depending on what you have purchased, this “cooling-off” period (the time you have to change your mind) may be longer.

If you do not receive your items and services according to your contract, there is help to solve the problem.



Search for “**Door-to-door**” on our website for more information.

The door-to-door game

It's a common sales ploy in the home repair business. Recognize the signs and never sign a contract on the spot.

“We can inspect your furnace free of charge.”

“We just happen to be in your neighbourhood.”

“It's a great deal because we have all our materials and equipment here.”

“You have to sign right away to get this special deal.”



Online shopping

Companies selling products on the Internet must email you a copy of the sales agreement they made with you within 15 calendar days of you making the purchase.



How do I protect my cell phone?

You should write down the International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) number of your cell phone. The IMEI is a unique number that identifies your phone. You can find the IMEI number by entering *#06# into your cell phone. The IMEI number can also be found under the battery of your phone (see page 11 for more information on the IMEI).

➔ WHAT ARE YOU BUYING?

INTERNET, CELL PHONE OR CABLE SERVICES

There are no free Internet, phone or cable services available for homes or apartments. Be careful when reading ads or talking to a person who comes to your door offering you special packages that sound too good to be true. You may be able to get lower introductory rates, but you have to consider how much the service will cost in the long-term.

There are different companies that can connect you with the Internet, phone or cable services and there are different types of services.

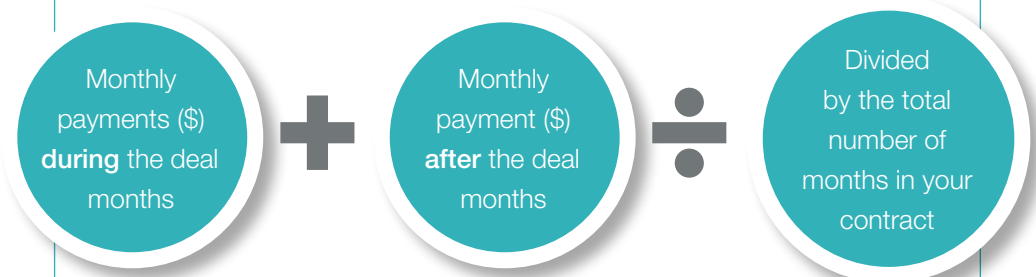
It is important for you to compare what different companies offer you before you sign up for any service or get locked into a contract.

Ask your friends and family what company they use for Internet, phone or cable services.

If you are offered a deal, ask your friends and family if they have heard of it. Do they think it is a good idea? Consider more than one company and compare the deals that they are offering.

Comparing Internet, cable and phone deals offered by different companies can be tricky. Here is a simple way to find out if one deal is better than another.

Add the cost of:



This will give you the actual monthly cost of the service over the length of the contract

Pre-owned phones

Before buying a pre-owned phone, you should check to make sure it has not been stolen. You can check its status in the National Phone Blacklist. If the list shows that the phone is blacklisted do not buy it. It will not work with any Canadian cell phone operator. You can find the National Phone Blacklist directory on the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association website.

Pre-owned computers and electronics

If you buy used computers and electronics you may pay less than what you would have paid in the store, but you might not have a warranty. Older technologies may not be as fast as new ones or be able to operate current software.



Ask the right questions about any deal you are offered to avoid surprises:

- What happens after the “free” months or “special offer” ends?
- After my “free” period what will be the amount of my regular bill?
- Do I have to sign a contract?
- How long is the contract?



Lost or stolen devices

If you lose your phone you can contact your mobile phone company and give them your IMEI number (See page 10.) They will list your IMEI number in Canada's National Phone Blacklist (protectyourdata.ca) to make sure that no one else can use it after you report it as lost or stolen.





Generic calling cards

There are prepaid calling cards which are not issued by a specific telephone company. These are often called generic cards. If you have a problem with one of these cards you must take your complaint to an agency of the federal government in Ottawa called the Competition Bureau. You can reach their office by calling toll-free **1-800-348-5358**.

PREPAID CALLING CARDS



You can buy prepaid calling cards in convenience stores or grocery stores to make long-distance telephone calls from your personal phone.

You may be using long distance prepaid calling cards to connect with your friends and families residing outside Ontario or Canada. Calling cards may seem inexpensive, but the cost can add up over time.



Ask the right questions before you buy a prepaid phone card:

- Is there a call connection charge, activation or service fee?
- Are there any connection fees on calls that do not go through?
- Do I lose the card value if I do not use it within a specific time period?
- Do I have to sign a contract?



If you have any complaints about a prepaid calling card issued by a recognized telephone company you can contact the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunication Services (CCTS) at 1-888-221-1687 or visit the CCTS webpage.

GIFT CARDS, GIFT CERTIFICATES AND VOUCHERS

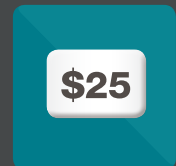
Gift cards and gift certificates or vouchers are very popular products. However, there are a few things you should consider before you buy these, since there are several laws governing their use in Ontario.

For the most part, gift cards, gift certificates and vouchers:

- Cannot have an expiry date.
- Are not subject to tax when initially sold.
- Cannot have special conditions or terms limiting their use.



Search for “**Gift cards**” on our website for more information.



Gift card basics

Shopping for a gift card is fast and easy. But keep in mind that some gift cards from retailers cannot be returned or exchanged. Read the terms and conditions before you buy.





Fake products basics

While you shop around, research the price of the item you want at different stores. If a deal seems too good to be true, it is almost certainly not a good deal.

If a vendor offers a “cash only deal” to avoid paying sales tax, it may be a sign of a counterfeit operation.

FAKE PRODUCTS



Fake products (also known as counterfeit products) are illegal copies of famous or expensive brands. People who make them try to fool consumers into believing they are getting quality products for less money. They can even be dangerous because they are not tested for safety like the real products. They are a major problem all over the world. Handbags, watches, clothing and electronics are among the most common counterfeit products.

How can I protect myself from buying fake products?

Do not buy products from the back of a truck or from someone just walking down the street. They may be counterfeit or stolen.



Ask the right questions using “the three Ps”:

- Where is the **place** of purchase? Choose reputable businesses you can trust.
- Are the **prices** so low they seem too good to be true? If so, what you are about to buy is likely a fake.
- What is the quality of the **packaging**? Does it look cheap with bad graphics and blurred printing? Are there spelling mistakes? These are all clues that a product is likely counterfeit.



Search for “**Counterfeit**” on our website for more information.



RENT-TO-OWN APPLIANCES

Renting is when you pay to use something for a certain amount of time, but you are not actually buying it. Renting may seem like a good deal since you are paying a monthly/weekly amount instead of the full price upfront. However, renting usually means you are spending more overall than if you paid for the product all at once. For example, you may rent a TV cable box for 12 months and own it at the end of this period. Your total cost may be higher because the rent includes interest charges. Make sure you know the total cost of any rent-to-own offer you are considering.

What happens if I am unable to make a rent-to-own payment on time?

If you have signed a rent-to-own contract but are unable to make a specified payment on time, the company might have a bailiff take back the product. In these cases, the money you have already paid is usually not returned to you.

What is a bailiff?

A bailiff is a person, licensed by the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, who acts on behalf of another person or company to take back an item or force a person to return it or leave their property because they cannot pay for it as they had agreed.

Comparing prices

Knowing the “total cost of borrowing” will reveal the true cost over the life of the rental agreement. This will help you to compare prices. In addition, always be sure you receive a written statement that explains all the terms and conditions.



Ask the right questions when considering a rent-to-own agreement:

- What is the length of term of the rental?
- What are the amounts, timing and number of payments?
- How much is the overall cost of the rent-to-own agreement?



Search for “**Buying and renting appliances**” on our website for more information on renting appliances.



Energy-efficient appliances

Energy-efficient appliances cost more initially, but your lower energy bills may put money back into your pocket long before the product wears out.



Employment in Ontario

Visit the Ministry of Labour's website to learn more about employment in Ontario: ontario.ca/labour or reach their office by calling toll-free **1-800-348-5358**.

SECTION 2: MONEY AND FINANCE

➔ PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SCAMS AND FRAUDS

There are many things to beware of when you are buying products and services. Learn how to avoid being a victim.

Tips to avoid fraud and scams

- Review your bills and bank statements carefully to see if there are any charges that you do not recall or do not make sense to you.
- Read carefully any contract that you enter into and make sure you fully understand it. Always keep a copy of everything you sign, including all contracts and any supplementary paperwork.



Search for **“Scams”** on our website for more information on common scams and identity theft.

BEWARE OF JOB SCAMS

“Guaranteed jobs”

You may see ads promoting job training that claim to guarantee employment. But after you have paid for the “training”, it often does not lead to employment and employers may not recognize the training or certification you have received.

Phony employment agencies

Scam artists will look for people who post their resume online or with a job search engine. They will promise to get you a “good” job. Then they will charge you for the “service”, but they will not find you a job.



Ask the right questions to protect yourself from scams:

- Who am I dealing with? Make sure it is a real business. Check reviews of the business on the Internet to see if consumers recommend it, or recommend you avoid it.
- Who am I giving my personal and financial information to, over the telephone, email, pop-up windows and at the door? Never share information unless you know the person or company you are dealing with.
- Am I being asked to pay a fee to win a contest prize? This is illegal in Ontario.
- Am I being pressured to make a purchase? Good companies always respect your right to choose.
- Is someone insisting on immediate payment? Avoid these high-pressure tactics.
- Is someone offering you a business or investment “opportunity” that you know nothing about? Is an employment agency “guaranteeing” you a job? Be careful of both!
- Have I consulted with others to see if the company I am considering buying from is trustworthy?



Employment scams basics

Requiring money up front is a common practice for work-at-home scams.

→ COMMON MONEY SCAMS

OVERPAYMENT HOOK

If you receive a cheque from someone for more money than you were expecting, or perhaps not expecting at all, be careful. Soon after, the sender may contact you and ask you to cash the cheque and send the extra money back to them because they made a “mistake”.

After you send back the so-called overpayment, you find that their original cheque is actually fake. By then, it is nearly impossible to get your money back. If you get an overpayment cheque, just ignore it. You do not have to respond.



Popular scams

*“Congratulations!
You just won a
FREE vacation!”*

*“Easy weight loss –
guaranteed!”*

*“Be your own boss,
work from home!”*

PHONEY CONTESTS

You may get an email or telephone call saying that you have “won” a lottery, a free trip or a large amount of money.

It is likely lottery fraud if:

- You are not familiar with the lottery contest or game.
- You never registered your name, address, email address, phone number and a credit card before buying a ticket on an online lottery website.
- You are asked to pay money up front for taxes or fees to claim your “win.”
- You must reply by a deadline or the money will be given to someone else.

If you respond to these emails, you will likely be asked to provide your bank or credit card information. You may also get an email asking you to change your bank card’s username. You may also be asked to send money from your bank account so that they can transfer the money you have “won.”

Do not provide your bank password or information to anyone!

Also, keep in mind that **your bank will never ask you to change your banking password through email.** Your bank will always ask you to visit one of its branches or a bank machine to reset your password.

CREDIT CARD SCAMS

Another common scam involves someone calling a consumer and claiming they are a bank official or police officer. The caller may claim that they are doing a fraud investigation. They may tell you that someone tried to make a big purchase with your credit card and you will be asked to verify your card number. They might know your full name and credit card number. However, they will ask you for the three-digit security code that is on the back of your credit card. Do not give out this information!

If you give them the security code, they can make online purchases with your credit card. If you get these types of phone calls, do not provide your credit card information. Instead, tell them you will call or visit your bank to deal with the issue. Then hang up the phone.

Call your credit card company right away and tell them about the phone call.

PYRAMID SCHEMES

A “pyramid scheme” starts when one or more people ask others to invest in a business. New members pay to join the scheme and are expected to bring in more people to invest in the business.

Members at or near the top of the pyramid get a share of the money every time a new person pays to join. It may look like the investment is paying off. However, every pyramid scheme reaches a point where no new “investors” can be found and the last investors – those at the bottom of the pyramid – lose their money.

GET-RICH-QUICK SCAMS

Someone may promise you that you can make a lot of money with no risk. Do not get tricked into believing that you can make “easy money”. It is best to avoid these types of investment schemes even if someone you know is offering them. The Ontario Securities Commission (OSC) can help if you think you have been a victim of an investment scam. For tips on proper investing and money matters visit the Investor Education Fund on the OSC website.

TEXT MESSAGE/SMS

If you receive a text message encouraging you to enter a contest or lottery to win a “great” prize, this can be another situation that demands caution. In this scenario, you may also be asked a few trivia questions and told that by answering them correctly you will win a prize.

But you are likely being tricked and the company is charging you money for every text message you reply to or they will charge you for any additional messages they send to you. The charge can be as high as \$2 to \$4 per text message.

If you have been fooled by one of these messages, talk to your telephone provider to see if they can block the sender.



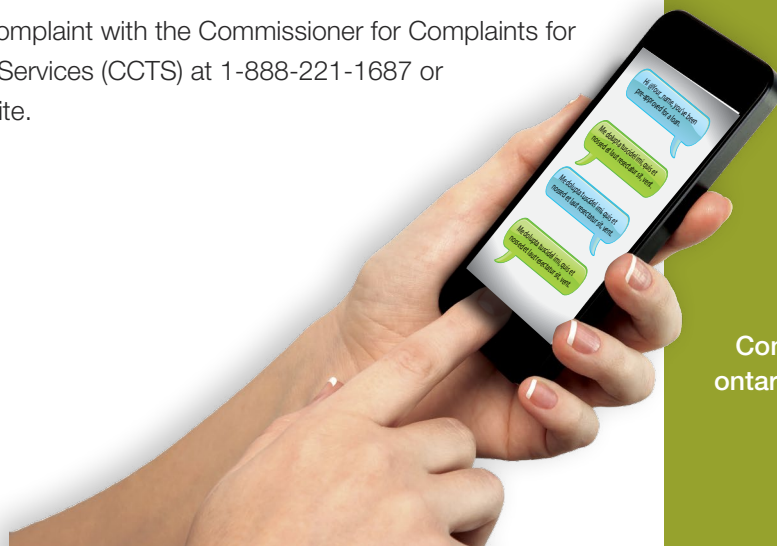
You can also file a complaint with the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunication Services (CCTS) at 1-888-221-1687 or visit the CCTS website.



Popular text/SMS scam messages

*Hi @Your_name, you've
been pre-approved for
a loan.*

*Congratulations! You
won a free tablet. Reply
to this text to claim it!*





Identity theft basics

Help protect yourself from debit and credit card fraud. Change your Personal Identification Number (PIN) regularly.

➔ IDENTIFY THEFT

WHAT IS IDENTITY THEFT?

Identity theft happens when someone uses your personal information pretending to be you. Identity thieves try to buy homes, cars and smaller items using your name and do not have to pay for it themselves. This kind of theft has become easier since the arrival of the Internet. These people may also use your information to get social services like welfare, or employment insurance, which is a form of fraud.

Criminals can try to steal your identity by:

- Stealing your bank/credit cards.
- Posing as an employer, bank or utility company employee and asking personal questions.
- Trying to trick you into sharing personal information such as your date of birth and address. They may also seek your passwords and bank account information, as well as confidential details from your government-issued identification cards.

It is very important for you to keep all your personal information private and secure and out of the hands of criminals.

Has this ever happened to you or someone you know?

- A person claims to be from your bank and asks you to give personal banking information, such as your account number or access codes, over the phone.
- You find a charge to your credit card that you did not authorize.
- Someone opens a bank account or takes out a loan or mortgage in your name.

If one of the above has happened to you, then you may be a victim of identity theft.



DETECTING AND AVOIDING IDENTITY THEFT

There are some steps you can take to protect against this practice:

- Store your personal information in a safe place.
- Review your bank and credit card statements regularly.
- Be aware of the timing of statements and bills you receive monthly. Call the company if you do not receive something when expected.
- Ask for a copy of your credit report from a consumer agency yearly. Check to see if it is correct. You can find more information about Canada's two credit reporting agencies, Equifax and TransUnion, on their respective websites.
- Never give out your Social Insurance Number (SIN) unless required by law (for example, to an employer or for tax purposes).
- Keep your Ontario health card in a safe place and do not share the information on it with anyone other than a recognized health-care provider or representative of the Ontario government.
- Shred or destroy papers with personal information before throwing them out to prevent anyone from accessing your private information.
- Never give personal information such as your bank account number, password, or username, to anyone who contacts you by phone. If the business is legitimate, you can call back at the phone number the business has published.
- When you use any bank or credit card at a bank machine, block the keypad with your hand so no one else can see what you enter. Be careful of people standing behind you who may be able to see.
- Choose passwords that a thief cannot easily guess. Do not use your name and birth date as passwords. Change your passwords often.
- Destroy expired and unused credit and debit cards. The card may be expired, but the number could still be valid.
- Use anti-spyware and anti-virus software (used to detect and remove harmful software downloaded on your computer) to protect information stored on your computer.
- Do not reply to spam or emails that ask for personal information, credit card details, passwords or other sensitive information.



Identity theft basics

Phishing:

Phoney emails designed to look like authentic messages.

Vishing:

Fake pre-recorded and untraceable phone calls using VOIP (voice over internet protocol).

Smishing:

Bogus SMS with links to phishing websites.



Credit basics

Without a credit history in Ontario you may need someone else, such as a relative or close friend, to sign the loan agreement (a co-signer). The co-signer must have a good credit score.

➔ DEBT ISSUES

BORROWING MONEY

Borrowing money to help pay for major purchases such as a house, car or furniture is common in Ontario. Seeking a mortgage or loan, or using a credit card (see the Understanding Credit chart below) are all important ways that people use to help them buy products and services that they need.

Being able to obtain credit is very useful. But it is important to keep in mind that whatever way you borrow money, it will need to be paid back. Debt should be taken on only if you have a realistic plan to pay it off. Many people fall into the trap of borrowing an increasing amount of money that they then find very difficult to repay.

It is a good idea to become better informed about the different ways to obtain money and to figure out what form of borrowing is best for your needs. In addition, it is useful to understand what is involved in successfully getting a loan or other forms of credit.

UNDERSTANDING CREDIT

The chart below explains common terms related to borrowing money and the factors that impact your ability to get credit.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| WHAT IS A LOAN? | A loan is an amount of money that you receive from an institution like a bank. It is expected to be paid back with interest (extra money you have to pay in addition to the amount of the loan). Loans are typically repaid by minimum payments made in regular intervals. |
| WHAT IS A MORTGAGE? | A mortgage is a special type of loan that is used to finance the purchase of a home. It is usually the largest debt that most people take on in their lives. The interest payments on mortgages – which tend to be long-term agreements – are calculated differently than most other loans. It is typical that buyers need to secure a mortgage in order to pay for their home. |

| | |
|---|--|
| WHAT IS AN OVERDRAFT? | An overdraft is when a bank allows you to have access to more money than is in your bank account. The overdraft is for a particular amount, such as \$1,000. You begin to use your overdraft when the balance in your account goes below zero. If you use your overdraft, you must pay it back on an ongoing basis. Most banks charge a fee for accounts that go into overdraft. |
| WHAT IS A CREDIT SCORE? | A credit score is a rating that is based on your history of paying off loans and other bills. If you have regularly paid loans and other bills on time, then you will have a higher credit score than if you did not. A bank or other lender will look at your credit score and decide how risky it might be to lend you money based on what you have done in the past. |
| WHAT IS A CREDIT REPORTING AGENCY? | A credit-reporting agency collects information from various places about your borrowing and bill-paying habits. These agencies provide this information to companies such as banks, when you apply for a loan. The bank will go to a credit reporting agency to get information about how you have paid your loans and other bills in the past. |
| WHAT IS A CREDIT HISTORY? | A credit history is a report created by a credit-reporting agency that shows how you have paid your bills in the past. Banks and other lenders use the information on how you have handled loans in the past as one way to decide whether they should give you a new loan. |

How can I build a credit history and get a good credit score?

You can start to build a credit history if you get what is known as a “secured” credit card. It means you pay the bank a certain amount of money to cover the card as security, for example \$500. You then use the card to buy up to \$500 worth of goods and you pay off what you bought on the card in full by the due date every month. You then reload the card every month. This will help you build a good credit score.

If possible, pay all of your bills on time and in the full amount – late bill payments can lower your credit score.



Credit history

Industry Canada, part of the federal government, has some useful tools, videos and calculators on credit history. Visit their website at ic.gc.ca.

The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, an agency of the federal government has resources that also may be helpful. Visit their website at fcac-acfc.gc.ca



Payday loans fact

Consumers who take out an average payday loan of \$300 can pay up to \$63 in fees.

This means that anyone earning \$10.25 an hour would need to work more than six hours just to cover the fees.

How can I check my credit history?

Your credit history is available on what is known as a credit report. You can get a copy of this report from the two main credit reporting agencies in Ontario, (Equifax Canada and TransUnion) by mail or in person. This is available in person or by mail for free, but there is a fee if you want to get it immediately online.

You should check your credit history via one of these reports every year or so, and make sure the information is correct. If you are concerned about any of the information that appears on your report, you can bring it to the attention of Equifax Canada or TransUnion. If you still have a concern with the information on the report after contacting these organizations you can get in touch with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services for assistance.



Search for “**Credit report**” on our website for more information.

Making informed choices when borrowing money

Some kinds of borrowing are a better choice than others. Certain types of loans or credit cost you more to pay back. Make sure you understand your options and are making a decision that works best for you.

PAYDAY LOANS

Payday loans are a very expensive way to borrow. These loans can at first seem appealing because you can borrow a small amount of money, such as \$100. If you qualify for a payday loan, you can get your money right away.

People who do not have a good credit score may consider the option of a payday loan to be a good one. But be careful when considering this form of borrowing. There are cheaper ways to borrow money.

Although payday loan companies cannot charge you more than \$21 for each \$100 you borrow, there are examples of these lenders trying to add other charges, which can add to the overall cost of borrowing. This can end up being very expensive relative to other ways of borrowing money.

You cannot get another payday loan from the same lender until you pay off the first one in full. To get such a loan, you will usually have to produce proof of three months' of work history or some other proof of regular income, a recent utility bill in your name (to prove your residence) and an active chequing account. They are called “payday loans” because a person who gets such a loan usually uses his or her next or previous pay stub from an employer as proof and the “promise” they will repay the loan.

As such, they are closely tied to a person's pay cycle – so it is important to remember that the repayment terms of these loans is very short. There is a danger of falling into a continuing cycle of using your wages to pay off one loan and then right away needing to borrow again.



Search for “**Payday lending**” on our website for more information.

The chart below shows that there are less expensive ways for you to borrow money than turning to a payday loan.

| | LINE OF CREDIT | CREDIT CARDS | PAYDAY LOANS |
|------------------------|---|--|--|
| COST | LOWEST | HIGHER | HIGHEST |
| WHAT IS IT? | <p>Predetermined loan that allows you to spend up to a certain amount.</p> <p>Differs from a traditional loan where the lump sum of funds is given at once.</p> | <p>Allows you to pay for goods and services based on your promise to pay for them. You must pay the set minimum monthly payments.</p> | <p>Small value, unsecured loan which guarantees repayment with a post-dated cheque or pre-authorized debit.</p> <p>It is very expensive, and may contain built-in charges.</p> |
| HOW DO I QUALIFY? | A positive credit rating. | A positive credit rating in Ontario. | <p>3 months of work history (some companies may accept proof of regular monthly income.)</p> <p>A recent utility bill in your name.</p> <p>Active chequing account.</p> |
| WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS? | <p>Automatic access to funds.</p> <p>Interest rates are generally lower than credit cards.</p> | <p>Build your credit rating.</p> <p>Reward programs*</p> | <p>Quick access to funds.</p> <p>Limited to your weekly earnings.</p> |
| WHAT'S IMPORTANT? | Interest rates and fees. | <p>Interest rates, fees and costs, rewards and benefits</p> <p>If you can, pay off your credit balance monthly.</p> <p>The cost of a credit card increases significantly if you do not clear the balance every month or make minimum monthly payments.</p> | <p>You cannot be charged more than \$21 for each \$100 you borrow. Additional fee charges are not permitted.</p> <p>You cannot get a second payday loan from the same lender until you pay off the first one in full.</p> <p>If you do not use any of the money, you can cancel the payday loan within two days.</p> |

*Many credit cards offer reward programs for customers, offering different types of rewards such as travel rewards and cash rebates for using the credit card. Do your research and make sure you understand what you are getting.



Banking basics

You can find more information about banking in Ontario under the “personal finance” section at: settlement.org



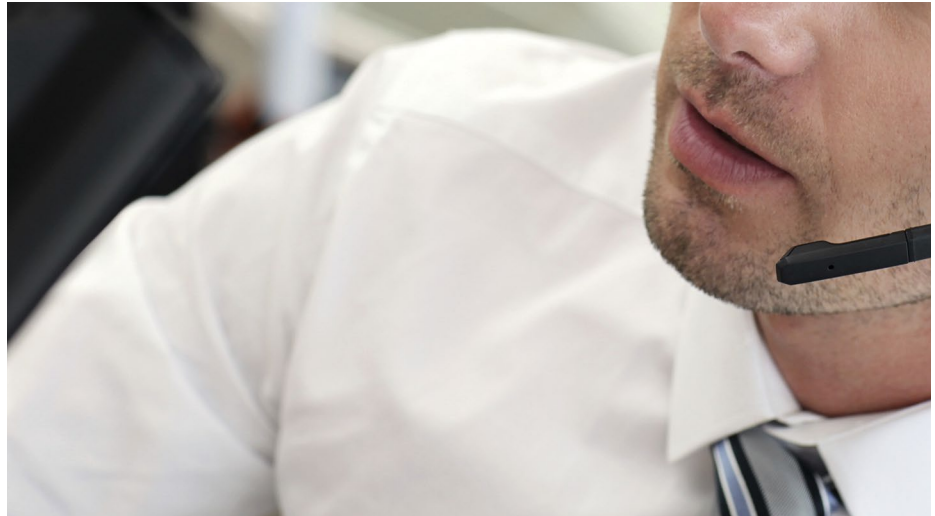
Collection agencies basics

Ignoring a collection agency's attempts to contact you will not help solve your problems. It might stop the collection calls but, if they cannot reach you, they may proceed with legal action. Sooner or later, you will have to deal with your debt problems.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I DO NOT PAY MY DEBTS?

If you have debts you cannot pay, it is important to talk to the person or company to whom you owe money. When creditors understand the problem, they may try to work out a reasonable way for you to repay your debts. If you do not pay a company the money you owe, they might send the debt to a collection agency and/or take you to court to get an order for payment.

What is a collection agency?



A collection agency is licensed by the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, and works for a company that is trying to recover money it believes it is owed. The collection agency will take whatever steps it can as allowed by law to try to collect the money, but must operate within the law in doing so.



Visit our website and search under **“Personal finance”** for more information.

Problems with collection agencies

There may be times when you feel a collection agency is contacting you by mistake, or harassing you. There are some steps you can take to prevent this:

- Send a registered letter (this means someone must sign at the location you have sent the letter to prove they received it) to the agency saying that you dispute the debt and that they should seek to take you to court.
- Notify the agency (also by registered letter) to communicate only with your lawyer. You must provide your lawyer's name, address and phone number.
- Keep proof that your letter was received.

Information a collection agency must give you

If a collection agency contacts you over money that they believe you owe a company, they are required to first send you written notice that includes:

- The company's name and authority to collect payment from you.
- The name of the person/business to which the money is owed.
- The amount they claim you owe.

The agency must also:

- Wait six days after mailing the notice before calling you.
- Let you know that it recommends that the creditor (the person or business that you owe money) to take legal action.
- Once they have spoken with you, the agency cannot contact you (including through voicemail or email) more than three times in a seven-day period, unless you allow them.
- Collection agencies *can* contact you:
 - Monday to Saturday: between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m.
 - Sunday between 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The agency cannot:

- Use threatening or profane language.
- Use undue or reasonable pressure.
- Continue to contact you if you have already told them you are not the person they are looking for, unless they take reasonable steps to ensure you are that person.
- Give false or misleading information to anyone.
- Contact you on a public holiday.



If you believe a collection agency has violated your rights, you can call us at 1-800-889-9768 or 416-326-8800 (TTY 1-877-666-6545 or 416-229-6086), or email us at: consumer@ontario.ca



Collection agencies tip

Once you speak with a collection agency, they cannot call you more than three times in a seven-day period.

➔ SENDING MONEY OVERSEAS ("REMITTANCES")

Ontario is home to people from all over the world. Once they start working, many people send money to family or friends in other countries. In Ontario these remittances can total hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

Keep the following tips in mind when you are sending money:

- There are different ways to send money outside Canada.
- You can do it through your bank or through other companies that transfer money overseas.
- Different ways of sending money have different fees.
- Companies are now charging fees from \$12 to \$20 to send money.
- Compare terms and conditions to find the best price for what you want to do.
- Talk to people you trust to try to find a reliable company.

Protect your money transfers

One of the most common forms of remittance involves sending money electronically from one location to another. A range of companies including banks and private companies are in the business of transferring money all over the world.

You must protect yourself when sending money in this way, especially if you are using a company that you do not know well. Before transferring your money, get a written receipt stating the name of the business transferring the money and the amount you are sending.

Dishonest businesses will often offer you a higher money exchange rate and no receipts for your transfer. Without a receipt, there is no proof that you sent any money. You then cannot make a documented consumer complaint against the business if your family member or friend does not receive the money. It is not worth taking the risk of losing your money. Always remember that if a deal sounds too good to be true, it is probably a scam.

Companies that transfer money have to be registered with the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada. Before sending money through a money transfer agency, search for their name in Money Services Business (MSB) directory. If the name does not exist in the MSB directory, then you are dealing with an unregistered business. It is best to avoid such a business.



Ask the right questions when you send money transfers:

- What happens if the money does not arrive?
- How will my family or friends receive the money?
- Will I get my money back if the person I am sending it to does not receive the money?



Visit [fintrac.gc.ca](https://www.fintrac.gc.ca) for information on money services businesses.



Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO)

Real estate agents are registered with RECO and must follow a code of behaviour. Visit reco.on.ca for more information.

SECTION 3: FINDING A PLACE TO LIVE

➔ BUYING A HOME



Buying a home is the largest and most important purchase most people will make.

Even if you have been through this process prior to arriving here, it is important to understand the unique aspects involved when buying a home in Ontario.

ADVICE ON BUYING A HOME



Here are some things to consider:

- A real estate agent can help you to buy a home.
- Real estate agents are registered with the Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO) and must follow a code of behaviour.
- The RECO rules protect you when you give an agent a deposit or down payment to buy a house. Before you hire a real estate agent, make sure that he or she is registered with RECO by visiting their web page at **reco.on.ca**.
- Check to make sure that the house you are looking to buy is worth the price. Compare the prices of similar houses in the same area. You can also compare prices by going to the Canadian Real Estate Association's website at **realtor.ca**. An agent can also help you with this.

BUYING A NEWLY-BUILT HOUSE

- When you are buying a house that is in the process of being built, you will sign a contract with a builder.
- Before you sign a contract, check that the builder is registered with Tarion (tarion.com). The Tarion Warranty Corporation regulates the new home building industry.
- There are laws that protect people buying newly-built homes.
- There are also special rules and benefits that apply to first time homebuyers.



If you have questions you can also call Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation at 1-800-668-2642 or visit **cmhc.ca**.



TARION

Tarion administers the Ontario New Home Warranty Program. It protects new home buyers in a number of ways, including if their builder goes bankrupt or does not do something as required by the purchase agreement.

It also supports buyers in getting compensation if their new home is not completed on time.

In addition, it helps to ensure that buyers get a home built with quality construction and materials. Tarion investigates illegal building practices and resolves conflict between builders and buyers.

You can visit the Tarion website for more information at:

tarion.com

Consumer Protection Ontario
ontario.ca/consumerprotection



Condo buying tip

When you buy a newly built condo you have a 10-day cooling-off period during which you can cancel your purchase. With resale condos you do not.

BUYING A NEWLY-BUILT CONDO

- In Ontario, a condominium (known commonly as a “condo”) refers to a type of property ownership.
- Condos are self-governing communities with rules to regulate and guide their operation and business affairs.
- Under Ontario’s Condominium Act there are special rules protecting people who are buying a newly built condo directly from a builder.

Know your rights when buying a newly-built condo

- You have the right to cancel the purchase within 10 days during the “cooling-off period”.
- You can back out of the agreement within 10 days after you find out something significant that the builder did not tell you about.
- If you cancel under these circumstances, the builder must refund any deposits you gave plus any interest earned on your money.
- Like all new home purchases newly-built condo units are covered by the Ontario New Home Warranties Plan Act, which is overseen by the Tarion Warranty Corporation.

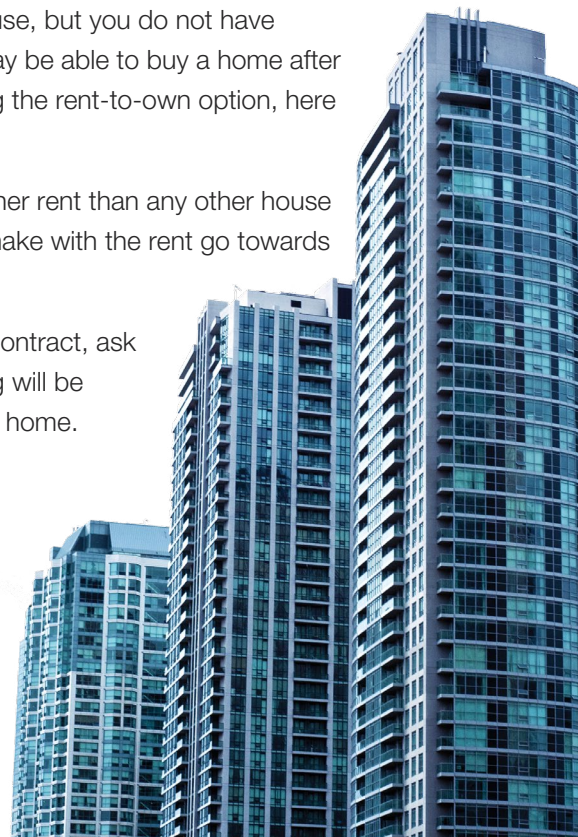


Visit [ontario.ca/condos](https://www.ontario.ca/condos) for more information.

RENT-TO-OWN A HOME

In some cases, you may want to buy a house, but you do not have enough of a down payment saved. You may be able to buy a home after renting it over a period. Before considering the rent-to-own option, here is what you need to know:

- Rent-to-own homes may have a higher rent than any other house or apartment. Extra payments you make with the rent go towards your down payment.
- Before you accept the rent-to-own contract, ask if the extra payments you are making will be returned if you decide not to buy the home.
- Do your research. Find out what happens to the portion of money you have paid towards a down payment if the owner goes out of business.



PAYING FOR A HOME

A majority of people have to borrow money to cover for the cost of buying a home. A loan to pay for a house is known as a mortgage. It can be difficult to get a mortgage as a newcomer without much history of borrowing and paying off loans in Ontario. But you must be careful about where you turn to borrow money to buy a home. There are companies that will try to take advantage of newcomers and other people who are having difficulty in getting a mortgage directly from a bank.

Be careful of “mortgage approved” advertisements

Some companies will place ads promising that they can easily get you approved for a mortgage. These companies sometimes ask you to pay them a certain amount of money before you get your mortgage loan approved.

It is not a good idea to do business with these companies!

Know your rights when dealing with a loan broker

People who find it harder to get a loan from a bank will sometimes turn to loan brokers who work on their behalf to secure a mortgage. It is important to know that some loan brokers ask consumers to do things that do not comply with Ontario rules. Be careful!

To protect yourself you need to know:

- It is illegal for a person to charge in a fee in advance of providing you a loan.
- A contract must clearly state the total amount payable by you to the loan broker and the terms and method of payment.
- Within 15 days of a consumer's demand, a broker is required to give a full refund of any fees that may have been paid that are not in compliance with the law.
- A broker must provide specific information in the contract, including the:
 - name and business address of the loan broker and the name of the potential lender (if known)
 - amount of money to be borrowed.

If convicted of an offence, loan brokers can be fined as individuals up to \$50,000 and/or sentenced to two years in jail less a day. As corporations, they can be fined up to \$250,000.



Settlement services

To locate settlement services in your community that can help you with finding a place to live and other supports visit: settlement.org.

You can also visit ontario.ca/affordablehousing for assistance with housing.



Moving tip

Make sure your contract states who is responsible for any damage or loss.

Under the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, a consumer may:

- Cancel the agreement within 10 days of entering the agreement. It is best to cancel by registered, mail or fax.
- Cancel within one year if the company did not deliver an agreement that meets the requirements of the act.

To make sure you are dealing with a reliable company, it is best to use licensed qualified mortgage and real estate professionals.



Search for “**Your home**” on our website for more information.

→ MOVING

When you have found a place to live, you need to organize moving in. You can start by asking friends or family if they can help you.

When hiring a moving company it is a good idea to:

- Ask people you know to suggest movers they have used and liked.
- Check if the company is listed with the Canadian Association of Movers at: **mover.net**.
- Call at least three moving companies and get them to visit where you are living now, and tell you how much it would cost to move all of your belongings. This is known as an “estimate”. Get the estimate in writing and have it made part of the mover’s contract with you.
- Read the written agreement before you sign it. **The final price the mover asks you to pay cannot be more than 10 per cent more than what is written in the agreement.**
- When considering a mover, ask for the names of customers the company has moved before. Call the company’s past customers and ask them about their experience. If the company will not provide you with the names of any of their customers, you should choose another company.
- Look for information about the company you want to hire. Check to see if the company’s name is listed on the “Consumer Beware List” at **ontario.ca/consumerbeware** or on the Better Business Bureau’s webpage at **bbb.org**. If you find any negative information about the company, you should hire another mover.



Some movers deceive customers. For example, a dishonest moving company may refuse to unload your belongings until you pay them more money than was agreed to. It is illegal to do this. So take the time to choose a good company.



Search for “**Hiring a mover**” on our website for more information.

If you have a problem with a mover

- Tell the movers they must do what is in the written agreement.
- Tell the movers they are breaking the law by not following the agreement.
- If the company makes you pay more money in the middle of a move, tell them you are doing it because they are forcing you.
- Record the name of the person in charge, and the licence plate of the truck.
- Write to the business and outline your concerns. You can also contact the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services using the information below to file a complaint.
- Contact the police and ask them how to file a report.

If you believe a moving company has violated your consumer rights, you can call us at 1-800-889-9768 or 416-326-8800 (TTY 1-877-666-6545 or 416-229-6086), or email us at consumer@ontario.ca to see if you can file a complaint.



Visit the **Filing a Consumer Complaint** section of our website for more information.



Moving tip

Make sure they inspect your furniture and items in-person before giving you a quote.



OMVIC

You are better protected if you buy from a dealer registered with Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC).

For more information visit:
omvic.on.ca.

SECTION 4: GETTING AROUND

Part of getting settled in your community is figuring out what kind of transportation you will use to get from place to place – whether to get to work, school, shopping, or simply to explore. There are a number of alternatives in getting around and there are different costs and considerations depending on which method you choose.

➔ RENTING A CAR

If you have a driver's licence that is valid in Ontario, you may rent a car from local car rental dealers. You may also find local car sharing companies (see the box on car sharing services on page 45). Some companies rent cars at an hourly rate. Other companies rent them by the day, or as a "weekend package." Choose a company that best fits your needs. There may also be an age minimum to rent a car.

Make sure to get everything in writing.



Ask the right questions before you rent a car:

- How much money do I have to deposit, and what will be my total renting cost?
- Do I have to pay for the fuel I use, or is it included in the cost?
- Is car insurance included in the cost?
- What happens if I do not return the car on time?
- Where will I pick up and drop off the car?



➔ BUYING A CAR



Buying a car is big decision. It is expensive to purchase, and there are many ongoing costs to maintain a vehicle. It is a good idea to consider the overall costs you will have to pay when you are thinking about buying a car.

Where to go to buy a car?

Choose a registered dealer

Whether you are buying a new or used car, you are better protected if you buy from a dealer registered with the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (omvic.on.ca).

The council has a fund that may give you all or some of your money back if you run into certain difficulties with a car you buy from one of their registered dealers. If you buy a car from someone who is selling privately, you will not have the protection of the fund.

Curbsiders

These are unregistered dealers who pose as private sellers and often misrepresent the vehicles they sell. They may sell vehicles with accident damage, a tampered odometer or even with outstanding payments still to be made.



Taxis

Taxis are a handy way to get around most urban areas. But there are some things you need to keep in mind:

- When you are in a taxi make sure the driver turns on the meter to show the cost of the trip.
- If the driver does not turn the meter on, you do not have to pay for the ride.
- You have the right to tell the driver which route you want to take to get you to where you want to go.

Buying from a private seller

Here are some things to consider if you are buying a car from someone selling the vehicle privately:

- Someone selling a car privately must give you a document called an official Used Vehicle Information Package (UVIP) that will give you information about the history of the car.
- If the seller refuses to give you the UVIP or any other document related to the history of the car, you should walk away.
- Be very careful about buying a car if you do not have information about its history.
- Before you buy a car from a private seller, you should always take the car to a licensed, independent mechanic to inspect it for possible problems.
- Ask family, friends or other people you know for the name of a good mechanic.
- If the seller does not want you to take the car to a mechanic of your choice, you should consider not buying the car.
- Always ask to take the car for a drive before you buy it. If the seller will not let you test-drive it, you should consider not buying the car.

Do not transfer your money to the car owner when buying cars through online websites, such as eBay, Kijiji or Auto-Trader. The person who placed the ad could just be trying to trick you. Always meet the owner in person when you are buying a car. Bring a friend or relative to see the car.

It can be cheaper to buy a used car, but it may need more repairs sooner.

What to do when the car you bought has a lot of problems

If your car is less than four years old and has major mechanical problems, you may want to get help from the Canadian Motor Vehicle Arbitration Plan (CAMVAP). For more information visit CAMVAP's website at camvap.ca or call 1-800-207-0685.





Ask the right questions to determine whether you can afford the cost of the car you are considering:

- How much are the monthly payments?
- What is the cost of:
 - insurance?
 - gas?
 - parking?
 - maintenance and repairs?



Visit the **Motor Vehicles** section of our website for more information.

→ LEASING A CAR

When you lease a car, you do not actually own the vehicle. Instead, you pay monthly for the long-term use of the car. Lease agreements usually run for 36 to 72 months (that is, three to six years). So this means that you can switch cars every few years for an additional cost. Under most lease agreements at the end of the contract, you can give the car back to the dealer, or buy it for a prearranged price. But keep in mind different companies have varying rules in their agreements.

Understanding what is in your lease agreement before you sign it

Keep in mind that leasing a car means that you are always making monthly payments. If you buy a car you will eventually pay off the cost of the vehicle, but at the end of the lease you will not actually own the car. So leasing a car can be more expensive over the long-term.



Ask the right questions when leasing a car:

- What is the cost of having to buy it at the end of the lease?
- Are there penalties that I have to pay if the car goes over a certain mileage or has a lot of “wear and tear” by the time my lease is finished?
- Do I need to give a deposit (or “lump sum”) before I start the monthly payments?



For more information on leasing a car, visit the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC) website at omvic.on.ca.



Leasing a car

Leasing a car can mean that you will pay less each month than if you were buying the same car and making monthly payments to cover the costs.

But at the end of the lease, which may be several years later, you do not own the car.



Car insurance

You will need car insurance to drive in Ontario. You will not be able to register your car – making it legal to be driven in this and other provinces — until you have insurance.

→ CAR INSURANCE

Anyone who owns or leases a car in Ontario must have vehicle insurance. You pay a company to provide you with insurance, which protects you and other drivers on the road if there is an accident that causes damage to property or injury to people. Insurance provides benefits to cover medical expenses and replace income lost due to a car accident.

It is a very serious offence to drive in Ontario without having insurance coverage. You will have to pay \$5,000 to \$25,000 in penalties the first time you are caught driving without insurance.

How much you pay for insurance coverage depends on a range of things including how old you are and how long you have been driving. New drivers have to pay more for insurance. If you have recently immigrated to Ontario, you will be considered to be a new driver, even if you were driving for years somewhere else. Your insurance fees will start to go down the longer you have been driving in Ontario and if you have a safe, accident-free driving record.

What you should know before you buy car insurance

There are many companies selling car insurance, so it is important for you to compare and know what you are getting.

Here is some useful advice:

- Make sure you understand what is covered under the insurance.
- Ask friends and family you trust for the name of a good car insurance company.
- The monthly insurance payments are lower for some cars and higher for others. So you may want to call a car insurance company before you buy a car, so you know what the fees will be.



Go to the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO)'s website at fSCO.gov.on.ca to learn how you can be a smart insurance buyer.



You can also find out more about buying car insurance by visiting ibc.ca.

→ ON THE ROAD

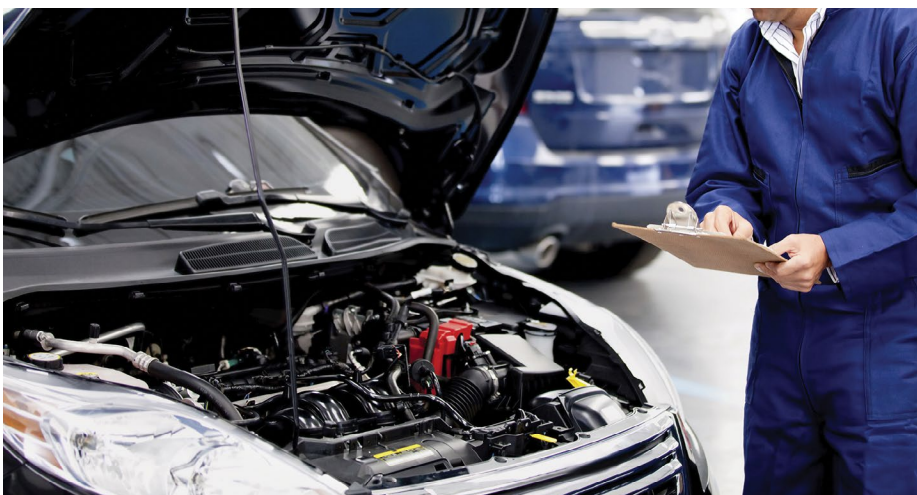


Repairs and maintenance:

All cars need regular maintenance including oil and fluid changes. It is also a good idea to have brakes and tires checked regularly.

Advice for finding a mechanic to repair your car

- Always get a written estimate.
- The mechanic shop cannot charge you more than 10 per cent over the price in the written estimate, unless you ask for more work.
- A mechanic must get your approval before they start work on your car.
- The shop also must provide you with a written invoice.
- You can ask to have any parts removed from your car given back to you so that you can see the damage yourself.



Visit the **Motor vehicles** section of our website for more information.



Getting your driver's licence

To find information about getting
your driver's licence in Ontario
visit: drivetest.ca

Consumer Protection Ontario
ontario.ca/consumerprotection



Four seasons of driving conditions

Changing seasons mean Ontario drivers have to face many different types of weather during the year. Driving from one season to the next is a challenging experience. To drive safely on snow and ice you will need winter tires on your car to better grip the road. When you drive in winter, you should have an emergency kit along with you in case your car breaks down. The kit should include a flashlight, small shovel and a snow brush.

For more ideas on safe winter driving visit: getprepared.gc.ca

➔ GETTING TOWED

Towing has become a serious consumer issue in Ontario. While many towing operators do run reputable businesses, some try to take advantage of people whose cars have been damaged or are not running properly. Be careful when choosing a towing operator.

Some people arrange – by joining a service like the Canadian Automobile Association, or by adding roadside assistance services to the purchase or lease of their car – to have towing and repair services “on call” in the event of an accident or breakdown.

If you do not have this service, make sure you know what to do if you ever need to call a tow truck:

STEP 1

Contact your insurance company and ask for information about towing and where to take your car to be repaired before an accident or breakdown happens.

STEP 2

If you have not done Step 1 and you are in an accident or your car breaks down and a tow truck approaches you, check to see if the vehicle has a municipal licence number written on the side. If it does, write it down.

STEP 3

Ask these questions before signing a contract with tow truck driver:

- How much will towing cost?
- Where will my car be towed?
- Can you take the vehicle to my preferred repair shop?

Some tow truck companies charge very high towing fees. A repair shop may pay tow truck drivers to take damaged cars to their business. It is against the law for a tow truck driver to try and take your car to a repair shop when you have not asked for this to be done.

Be sure you know how much it will cost before your car is taken anywhere. Also, do not sign a Vehicle Repair Contract for your car to be fixed, unless you have asked for it to be repaired. If you sign a contract that gets your car towed and repaired, you will be forced to pay the cost. In addition, in some cases, a repair shop can sell your car to cover the cost of the repairs.



Advice on dealing with a tow truck driver when your car breaks down:

- Get all information in writing.
- You may not get the service you expect without a written contract.
- Avoid paying cash.
- Get proof that you have paid (such as a receipt).
- You may need to send proof of what you have paid to your insurance company.
- If you are having trouble with your insurance claim, you can call the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (1-800-668-0128) for helpful information.

What to do if you think a tow truck company has violated your consumer rights:

- Contact your local police and file a written complaint.
- Check with the municipality where you were towed, to see if they regulate towing. If they do, make a written complaint with the municipality.
- If you are not happy with how you have been treated by a tow truck company you can call us at 1-800-889-9768 or 416-326-8800 (TTY 1-877-666-6545 or 416-229-6086), or email us at consumer@ontario.ca to see if you can file a complaint.



Visit the **Filing a Consumer Complaint** section of our website for more information.



Tow truck stats

There are approximately 1,200 tow truck operators and 3,000 tow truck drivers in the province. In 2010, tow truck operators in Ontario had a 19.7 per cent collision rate, compared to only 1.1 per cent for drivers of other commercial vehicles.



Parking rules

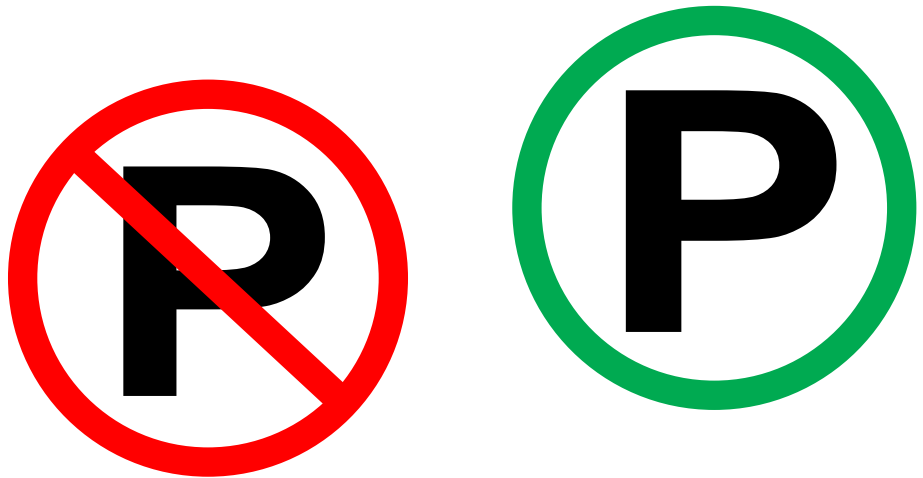
You can learn more about parking rules — and driving in Ontario in general — by reading the Driver's Handbook, available at ontario.ca/transportation



Road signs

To find out about road signs in Ontario visit ontario.ca and search the term "road signs."

➔ PARKING



There are varying parking rules in different communities in Ontario. Parking rules can change from one neighbourhood to the next or even one street to another. They can also change depending on the time of day or the time of the year. It can be somewhat confusing even for a driver who has lived in Ontario his or her whole life.

You must be very careful and read parking signs before you decide whether it is alright to leave your car in a particular spot. If you do not understand what a parking sign means, then you should try and ask someone nearby to explain it to you. It is important to follow the rules because if you park in the wrong place or at the wrong time, you can end up having to pay a fine or your car may be towed away. Be sure to leave your car only in areas where signs are posted saying you are allowed to park.

There are also privately owned parking lots that charge you to park on their property. If you have a problem with one of these lots, it is important to take your complaint to the owner of the lot — that is, a private business — and not a municipal government. The Consumer Protection Act covers such things as misrepresentation of rates in a private lot. For municipal lots, the CPA would not apply.

What happens if you park where you should not

If you park in the wrong place:

- You will have to pay a fine for parking illegally.
- Your car may be towed away by the Ontario Parking Authority (OPA) if you park somewhere like a fire route or a loading zone. You will have to pay a fee to the towing service and it might cost hundreds of dollars to get your car back.

- If you get a parking ticket or your car is towed away for parking in an illegal area, telephone the OPA (416-665-5672) or visit their website for more information (ontarioparkingauthority.com).
- You will need your car's licence plate number to get your car back, as well as proof of identity, such as your driver's licence.
- If you park in a privately owned parking lot and you get towed or ticketed, look for the company's contact information at the booth or automatic machine where you paid.
- To file a complaint against a parking and/or towing company you will need to follow the steps as described in the Consumer Protection Act, 2002. Begin by contacting the company first.



Visit the **Filing a Consumer Complaint** section of our website for more information.

CAR SHARING

Car sharing services are available in the Greater Toronto area and other large cities. The customer pays a car sharing company a fixed hourly rate for the use of a car. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- The money you pay usually includes the cost of gas and insurance for the car.
- There may be an age minimum to join and you may have to have some driving experience to use these services.
- The companies often charge you a one-time fee to register with the service and a fee once a year for being a member.
- Depending on your needs car sharing may be cheaper than buying and maintaining a car, and it allows you to get a car to drive when you need one.
- There are various places where you can pick up and drop off the car when you are done.
- You can search the Internet for car sharing services.



Subway and buses

Public transit (such as buses or a subway system) is usually the least expensive way for you to get around. But the public transit available to you will be different depending on where you live.



TICO

Book your vacation with a travel agency that is registered with the Travel Industry Council of Ontario (TICO).

For more information visit:
tico.ca

→ TRAVELLING

Going on a trip can be a major expense. You may want to take steps to protect the money you are spending on vacation. It is a good idea to book your vacation with a travel agency that is registered with the Travel Industry Council of Ontario (TICO). You can do a travel agency name search at TICO's directory at tico.ca.

If you do not get the travel services you paid for you may be eligible for a refund of up to \$5,000 per person from the Ontario Travel Industry Compensation Fund. You can contact them at 1-888-451-8426.

Protect your vacation plans

- If you are booking a vacation online, look for the TICO registration number on the website. Contact TICO if you are not sure where to find this.
- Some travel agents charge a non-refundable travel counselling fee or service charge. Always ask if your agent in advance if you have to pay such a fee.
- Ask your agent about what will happen if you have to cancel your trip. Find out the cancellation and refund policies when you are booking. Consider buying cancellation insurance that will ensure you get at least a partial refund if you get sick or other circumstances come up that force you to cancel your trip.
- Ads by Ontario travel agencies and wholesalers must show the full cost of the trip or the base price plus all the taxes, surcharges and other fees.
- Always get a written receipt of your payment. The receipt should state your name and address, the total price of the travel services, any fees, taxes and charges, the business name and registration number as well as information about trip cancellation insurance or health insurance.



Search for "**Travel and timeshares**" on our website for more information.





Travelling to another country

There are many additional helpful things you can learn about travelling. Visit the Government of Canada's "Travelling Abroad" website at travel.gc.ca/travelling

Planning a weekend trip with your friends and family?

Ontario is a beautiful province with lots to see and do.



Visit ontariotravel.net to plan your weekend trips.

Thinking of joining a bus tour?

Motor coach tours may be a convenient way to travel and sightsee, and there are many different options to choose from.

When you are doing research, make sure you choose a company that is registered with TICO (tico.ca).



Settlement services

To find information about bringing your relatives to Canada visit:
cic.gc.ca



SECTION 4: FURTHER INFORMATION

Return to this guide whenever you are looking for information on consumer matters such as protecting yourself while shopping online or signing a contract for goods and services.

If the answers you are seeking are not here, below are helpful resources and links that can take you to other places, where you can find what you need.

You also can always visit the Consumer Protection Ontario website at: **Ontario.ca/consumerprotection** where you will find useful information on various topics to help you to better protect yourself as a consumer. We can help you ask the right questions to become a smart consumer!

REFERENCE LIST

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR HELP?

Need to file a consumer complaint?

To determine if you have a complaint under Ontario's consumer protection law, or if you have questions about your rights you may contact Consumer Protection Ontario at: 416-326-8800 or 1-800-889-9768;

TTY: 416-229-6086 or 1-877-666-6545.



Visit the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services' "**Filing a Complaint Page**" for more information.

ServiceOntario: Your source for official documents

In Ontario, a government organization called ServiceOntario helps people and businesses connect to government services in a way that is faster and easier than ever before. It issues birth, death and marriage certificates, as well as driver's licences and health cards.

Avoiding scams when acquiring official documents

It is important to know that ServiceOntario is the only place you need to go to get these documents. Nobody can get these forms faster than you can on your own.

However, some non-government companies or “consultants” promise that, for an extra fee – a fee higher than you pay to ServiceOntario – they will assist in speeding up the process of getting documents for you from the government.

In Ontario, companies are allowed to complete applications for an individual if that individual has given permission. But be careful: Many of these companies are just filling out exactly the same forms that you or a family member or friend could fill out – and charging you extra for it. That means that you could end up paying a fee for the same service you could have accessed yourself – faster and cheaper – through ServiceOntario!

In addition, ServiceOntario takes many steps to keep your personal information secure, whether you submit it in person or electronically.

ServiceOntario has physical locations all over Ontario. You can find the one nearest you, and access services online by visiting [ServiceOntario.ca](https://www.serviceontario.ca)

Administrative Authorities

Administrative authorities help the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services to regulate and enforce legislation in many areas such as travel, real estate and public safety.

These organizations may also be able to assist you with consumer complaints and information about your rights.

The following is a complete list of the ministry's administrative authorities:

Board of Funeral Services (BOFS)

Contact BOFS for questions or complaints about a funeral home, funeral director or transfer service operator.

1-800-387-4458 | [funeralboard.com](https://www.funeralboard.com)

Electrical Safety Authority (ESA)

Contact ESA if you have a complaint about a licensed electrical contractor or if you suspect that a person is acting as an electrical contractor or master electrician without an ESA licence.

1.877.372.7233 | [esasafe.com](https://www.esasafe.com)



Ontario's Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC)

Contact OMVIC for information about buying or leasing a motor vehicle.

1-800-943-6002 | omvic.on.ca

Ontario One Call (ON1Call)

Contact ON1Call to request the location of underground infrastructure before digging or excavating.

1-800-400-2255 | on1call.com

Real Estate Council of Ontario (RECO)

Contact RECO for information about working with a Real Estate agent.

1-800-245-6910 | reco.on.ca

Tarion

Contact Tarion if you have a question or complaint about a registered new home builder or Ontario's new home warranty plan.

1-877-982-7466 | tarion.com

Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA)

Contact TSSA to report a safety violation in one of these sectors:

- Elevators, amusement rides and ski lifts.
- Boilers, pressure vessels and their operating engineers
- Natural gas, petroleum, propane and other fuels and equipment
- Upholstered and stuffed articles

1-877-682-8772 | tssa.org

Travel Industry of Ontario (TICO)

Contact TICO if you have a question or complaint about a registered travel retailer or would like to make a claim under its compensation fund.

1-888-451-TICO (8426) | (905) 624-6241 | tico.ca

Vintners' Quality Alliance Ontario (VQA)

Contact VQA if you have a question about Ontario's wine industry.

416 367-2002 | vqaontario.com

Lost bank card or credit card

Contact your bank or credit card company. Ask about the safety of your credit cards and bank accounts.

Ask for help notifying financial institutions and credit card issuers.

Have you become a victim of identity theft?

Contact credit bureaus to add a fraud alert to your credit file or report



Equifax | **equifax.ca** or 1-800-465-7166

TransUnion | **transunion.ca** or 1-800-663-9980

To report a scam:

The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre | antifraudcentre.ca or 1-888-495-8501



Telemarketing Fraud in Canada | rcmp-grc.ca/scams-fraudes/index-eng.htm

Legal assistance:



If you need legal assistance with a consumer-related matter, the Law Society of Upper Canada may be able to assist you, and can ensure you are working with a licensed legal professional. Visit: lsuc.on.ca for more information

Other sources of information for newcomers

For a comprehensive guide to life in Ontario for newcomers see www.Ontarioimmigration.ca

Articles, links, news and events, and much more information can be found at www.settlement.org

Accessible, easy-to-understand information for youth as newcomers is at www.newyouth.ca

And, the Orientation to Ontario site at www.orientationontario.ca has many resources designed to help newcomers settle in the province.



Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

This group provides a wide range of information for newcomers to Ontario, including helpful details on health, immigration, education and employment. Visit settlement.org for "Information Newcomers Can Trust."

Note: Please provide feedback on this guide by following this link and participating in a short survey:
<http://fluidsurveys.com/s/newcomerguidesurvey/>



Your go-to source
for information about consumer rights.

ontario.ca/ConsumerProtection

 facebook.com/ontarioconsumer  twitter.com/ontarioconsumer  youtube.com/ontarioconsumer

Disponible en français

© Queen's Printer for Ontario 2014

ISBN 978-1-4606-4473-7

