



For Immediate Release

## Does Ontario need a Northern Lens?

**December 3, 2020** – There is a longstanding frustration in Northern Ontario that Queen's Park does not 'think North' when developing policies and programs. As such, Northern Policy Institute's latest commentary *Does Ontario need a Northern Lens?* by Dr. Heather Hall dives into the possibilities and lessons around the creation and implementation of a northern policy lens.

A policy lens is a tool that is used to develop or review existing policies, programs, and/or government practices based on a particular theme. Within this framework, a rural lens is used to review all new and existing policies to ensure that urban and rural residents receive equitable treatment.

The commentary explores international and domestic examples of northern and rural lenses and how they operate once implemented in Northern Ireland, England and Canada. Using the takeaway lessons gathered from these cases, several key considerations were noted if Ontario were to implement a northern lens:

- **A policy lens needs a champion**
  - Any policy lens requires a strong champion within government to encourage 'buy-in' across government.
- **Where a policy lens is 'housed' matters**
  - A rural lens should be housed within a strong, central or horizontal unit within government.
- **A policy lens without authority becomes a 'tick-box' exercise**
  - A rural lens requires legislative authority or it becomes a suggested practice or a simple tick-box exercise within government.
- **A policy lens unit without appropriate resources is a recipe for limited success**
  - If the policy lens is to be applied effectively, strong financial and human resources are required. One suggestion is to spread policy lens experts throughout government in each government Ministry or Department to provide in-house guidance and support.
- **A policy lens should require engagement with impacted communities**
  - Ideally, a policy lens tool and process should be developed in consultation with impacted communities.
- **A policy lens requires a 'watchdog'**
  - A policy lens requires a formal 'watchdog' responsible for monitoring and evaluating to ensure the lens is being applied consistently and effectively.

"Policies that work in the south don't always work in the north. A northern lens can act as a reminder that Ontario is made up of many unique regions with different realities and may have the potential to reshape policy in and for Northern Ontario," said Hall.

Read the commentary here: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/do-we-need-a-northern-lens>

-30-



Media Interviews: Author Dr. Heather Hall and NPI President and CEO Charles Cirtwill are available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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**About Northern Policy Institute:**

*Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable communities in Ontario's western and northern regions.*

*Our operations are located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts our communities, our province, and our country.*

**About the Author:**

*Dr. Heather Hall is one of the leading scholars on innovation and economic development in rural and northern regions in Canada. She grew up in Northern Ontario and has a professional and personal interest in researching issues that are important to the North, including: the impacts of new technologies in the mining sector; the community impacts of large-scale industrial projects; and innovation and economic development policy, planning and practice. Her work has been recognized nationally and internationally, and has informed government policy in Canada, Northern Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Sweden. Dr. Hall is the co-lead of the University of the Arctic's Thematic Network on the Commercialization of Science and Technology for the North. She is also the lead researcher for Remote Controlled, a national project exploring the impacts of new technologies in the mining sector.*