

How Owen Sound is taking the fight to cancer in a unique way

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Owen Sound Mayor Ian Boddy

Medical isotopes. They sound like something out of the latest sci-fi movie. If you've never heard of them, you might be surprised to know that they are used globally more than 40 million times per year, [↗](#) for everything from cancer and heart disease treatments to diagnostic imaging.

You might be even more surprised to learn that there is one particular town in Ontario that has quickly gained a reputation as an innovation hub and center of excellence supporting the medical isotope supply chain. A founding member of the Southwestern Ontario Isotope Coalition (SOIC), that town is Owen Sound.

First, a little more about the numerous use cases for medical isotopes, of which there are many variations. Some can be used to sterilize medical devices. Others have the ability to target specific cancer cells without damaging other nearby tissue; and they do it well. The Canadian Nuclear Association [↗](#) says that with the development of Canadian radioisotopes, the cure rate for cervical cancer increased from 25% to 75%. They refer to medical isotopes as "the cornerstone of nuclear medicine."

How Owen Sound is uniting Southwestern Ontario's isotope community

Formed in June 2023, the SOIC celebrates partnership between public and private sector organizations, academic institutes and other industry experts. Founding partners include the Canadian Nuclear Isotope Council (CNIC), the Nuclear Innovation Institute (NII), and the City of Owen Sound, with support from Bruce Power [↗](#) and their partnership with Saugeen Ojibway Nation, Gamzook'aamin aakoziwin. Bruce Power, which has been a global leader in the production of medical isotopes for more than 35 years, has held a prominent place in OMERS Canadian portfolio since 2003.

The Coalition aims to unite Southwestern Ontario's isotope community and foster future opportunities to leverage the region's many strengths. This means developing a strategic plan to support expansion in the region, facilitate future public and private investment and explore ways to grow the region's role in the global supply. The goal is to create an ecosystem to help resolve global supply shortages, speed treatment delivery times and offer better access to lifesaving treatments.



In fact, Owen Sound Mayor Ian Boddy [recently discussed with the National Post](#) ↗ just how the Coalition is working together to make a tangible difference. Since 2022, Bruce Power has been producing a specific isotope which is used to target certain tumours. However, it loses more than half of its effectiveness each week.

“It’s refined in Germany and then shipped back to hospitals,” he explains. “It needs to reach Germany within five days to be processed and that leaves only a few days to get it to patients around the world. To the degree that we could refine the isotope here, we could cut the transportation time to hours, not days.”

There is potential here to make a true difference in the lives of patients. Says Boddy, “For anyone whose lives have been touched by cancer, we want to be part of the coalition that drives better and quicker access to these life-saving nuclear therapies.”

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