

## Campaign 2000 Questionnaire – Liberal Response

**1. In 2009, all parties voted unanimously to pass the Poverty Reduction Act. At a high level, The Act requires public consultation and development of a Poverty Reduction Strategy by government every five years. Will your party introduce a multi-year Poverty Reduction Strategy with targets and timelines to lift children and families out of poverty? What specifically will your party do?**

We are committed to continuing to build an Ontario where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential. The most recent annual report of the Poverty Reduction Strategy showed that we have reduced child poverty by nearly 25% compared to 2012, and 37.3% fewer children were living in deep poverty in 2015 compared to 2012. We will build on this progress by launching the consultation process for the next Poverty Reduction Strategy within one hundred days of returning to office. The next PRS will continue our commitment to making strategic investments across government – including in health, education and housing programs to address poverty. Including:

- Raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.
- Free tuition for over 200,000 low-and middle-income students.
- Extending rent control to all private rental units, regardless of age or unit type.
- Through OHIP+ we will provide the people of Ontario aged 24 and under as well as those 65 and over with free prescription medications.

The PRS is also about innovation and finding new ways to provide the support people need. A year ago we launched the Basic Income Pilot to test whether a basic income can help people living on low incomes. The pilot has reached full enrolment across all three sites in Hamilton, Brantford and Brant County, Thunder Bay and the surrounding area and Lindsay and is to last for 3 years. We are looking forward to the results of this ground-breaking study and are committed to continuing the pilot once re-elected. Through this pilot we are looking for evidence-based solutions that work. We want to help end poverty while improving services - making them simpler, more efficient, and more supportive for the people who need them the most.

**2. From diapers, healthy food and extracurricular opportunities, families face significant costs to provide their children with the best start in life. Will your party introduce further increases to the Ontario Child Benefit to help families support their children's health and development? What specifically will your party do?**

The Ontario Liberal Party is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty. The Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) helps low- to moderate- income families with the cost of raising children. This includes working parents as well as those receiving social assistance supports. About one million children and youth receive the OCB to a maximum of \$1,405.56 per child per year in 2018. The benefit is linked to the Ontario Consumer Price Index so it keeps pace with inflation to help protect the purchasing power of families with low to moderate incomes. Monthly benefits have more than doubled since introduction of the OCB. In 2017-18, OCB allocations were \$1,106.0 million and in 2018-19 this will rise to \$1,127.0 million. In 2018, we also invested \$15.4 million to the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent benefitting almost 10,000 children and youth.

**3. Working full time, all year should never leave anyone in poverty. Workers caring for a sick child should never have to choose between parenting and a pay cheque. Will your party raise Ontario's minimum wage to \$15/hour on January 1st? Will you increase the number of paid sick days from two days and enforce the protection of vulnerable workers? What specifically will your party do?**

No one in Ontario should struggle to pay their rent, put food on their tables or care for their families. We increased the minimum wage to \$14 on January 1, 2018 and will increase it to \$15 on January 1, 2019. Future annual increases will be tied to the rate of inflation. We have provided 10 personal emergency leave days to all employees, two of which are paid. These days can be used when a worker or family member is sick, as well as for other personal emergencies. We have also introduced 17 weeks of domestic violence and sexual violence leave, which includes 5 paid days. This ensures job protection and support for workers if they or their child has experienced or is threatened with domestic or sexual violence.

**4. Social assistance incomes are well below the cost of living in Ontario. These low incomes force people to rely on food banks and compromise their health in substandard housing. Will your party adopt the**

**recommendations of the Income Security Roadmap for Change report and its plan for transforming income security in Ontario - starting with a significant increase to basic OW and ODSP rates and moving to a standard flat rate structure? What specifically will your party do?**

Under Kathleen Wynne's leadership, this government has made monumental reforms to improve the lives of people receiving supports from our social assistance programs.

Since 2014, we have eliminated the provincial clawback of child support payments and the Canada Child Benefit, putting thousands of dollars into the pockets of families receiving social assistance across the province. We introduced a reloadable payment card for individuals receiving ODSP supports and reformed health benefits so clients can use their OHIP cards to access prescription drugs. We have raised social assistance rates in 13 of the last 14 years and also increased the asset limits and gift exemptions.

We now have a proposed plan for income security reform that begins to respond to all key action areas in the Income Security Roadmap. Our plan starts with a strong emphasis on turning social assistance into a simpler, more responsive, and person-focused system. We would invest an additional \$2.3 billion over the next three years, the largest single investment in social assistance over the last quarter century, to support a significant start on reform.

Our plan would mean more money in the hands of people receiving social assistance supports through a 3% increase per year over the next three years, the introduction of a Standard Flat Rate, changes to income exemptions (including benefits like CPP-D), access to mandatory vision and hearing benefits, and the elimination or simplification of a range of overly complex and onerous rules.

Over the next two years, we would collapse basic needs and shelter into one Standard Flat Rate. We would start by immediately removing the board and lodge category, which means 50,000 Ontarians would receive more assistance. This could lead to a rate increase of 43% for people receiving ODSP. By the third year, we will provide everyone on social assistance with a Standard Flat Rate.

We are also proposing an increase in earning exemptions from \$200 to \$400 per month in the first year and in year two, to annualize the exemption to \$6,000 per year, a 150% increase compared to today. By the third year, this total annual exemption of \$6,000 will also apply to payments from CPP-D, EI or WSIB

But that is not all, our proposed plan includes creating a system where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and are inspired and equipped to reach their full potential. For example, we would change the rules defining “spouse” for unmarried couples. Currently, after three months we assume unmarried people are supporting each other financially – we will be immediately changing this to three years. We would also fully exempt asset limits for people with disabilities.

Our plan would continue to improve services and increase supports for Ontarians receiving social assistance.

**5. It is increasingly difficult for low-income families to find safe, affordable housing, especially if there are family members with special needs. What specifically will your party do to get more low-income households into stable, long-term homes? Will your party support the construction of new social housing where low-income tenants pay no more than 30% of their total household income on rent? What specifically will your party do?**

We are committed to ensuring that the people on Ontario have a safe and affordable place to call home. When families have access to affordable housing, they are given the opportunity to reach their full potential. Unlike the PCs and the NDP, we have a solid track record on housing and will continue to make strategic investments in affordable housing. Under Kathleen Wynne’s leadership, the government has increased annual investment in housing to \$1 billion per year.

- We are supporting the creation of over 22,000 affordable rental housing units and more than 335,000 repairs to social and affordable housing units; and, providing rental and down payment assistance to over 93,000 households in need.
- Our government is investing up to \$200 million in operating funding for housing allowances and support services to assist up to 6,000 families and individuals over the next three years. We are also supporting the construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units over the long-term.
- Our Fair Housing Plan is protecting homebuyers and tenants alike, because everyone deserves a suitable home that they can afford. This includes extending rent control to all private units, which protects tenants from unfair and unaffordable rent increases.

- We unlocked the value of provincial lands and expanded funding for affordable housing, ensuring the affordability of tens-of-thousands of existing and future homes.
- Through the Development Charge Rebate Programs, we will provide over \$200 million in municipal supports to create market and below-market housing
- The National Housing Strategy will deliver over \$4 Billion dollars to support housing in Ontario, including new construction, a portable housing benefit, and the renewal of tens of thousands of units of social housing.
- We introduced inclusionary zoning, which gives municipalities the power to force affordable housing as part of development projects.

**6. Many families in Ontario face childcare fees that are as high as a second mortgage payment. Will your party commit to making child care more affordable by funding child care programs instead of individuals and putting in place low fees or no fees for parents? What specifically will your party do?**

Building an affordable, accessible and high-quality child care system is a top priority for the Ontario Liberal Party.

That is why we are investing \$2.2 billion over three years to increase access to child care and affordability for more Ontario families by introducing publicly funded preschool starting in September 2020. This investment also includes about \$1 billion over three years to support reduced fees and more subsidized spaces for infants and toddlers.

Our plan will save families an estimated \$17,000 per child, allowing parents to go back to work when they choose and help give children the best start in life. In Toronto, a family with a preschool-aged child could save an average of over \$20,000 during the time their child is enrolled in a licensed preschool program. A family with two children could save almost \$40,500 on average.

This bold plan builds on our historic investment to help 100,000 more children up to age four access licensed child care over five years, increasing the capacity for child care in Ontario for children in this age group. As part of this commitment, we are investing \$1.6 billion over five years in capital funding to create 45,000 new licensed child care spaces in schools and other community settings.

The commitment also includes ensuring that families with low and middle incomes benefit from access to new spaces, by providing subsidies for approximately 60 per cent of all new spaces, moving Ontario towards universal accessibility. Subsidies allow more children and their families to access quality licensed care.

And we're supporting Ontario's world-class early childhood educators and program staff by improving compensation through a wage grid aligned with early childhood education workers working in full-day kindergarten.

**7. Children in families that face discrimination in our society live in poverty in greater numbers – nearly half of children in recent immigrant families are in low income. Will your party introduce targeted strategies to support groups at higher risk of poverty, including women, single parents, racialized and Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ2S+ communities? What specifically will your party do?**

Under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we specifically track vulnerable groups with high poverty rates. We need to measure our success to help identify what might be working and where enhanced support and collaboration are needed.

The 11 PRS Indicators highlight that we are making progress across a range of measures, including decreases to child poverty. The indicators also tell us that some Ontarians continue to experience major barriers and need our support.

Many of our poverty reduction initiatives include specific targeted supports for sub-populations. For example, the Ontario Liberal mental health plan is the largest investment in this space in Canadian history. It includes specific investments in targeted populations, such as LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous, and racialized communities.

**8. Research shows that child poverty is a leading cause of poor health and health inequities that can last a lifetime. Will your party expand pharmacare so that everyone has access to affordable prescription drugs? Will your party expand public dental programs so that everyone has access to oral health care? What specifically will your party do?**

Universal access to health care and a commitment to health equity are fundamental values underpinning our health care system. Ontario Liberals



believe in a universal publicly-funded health care system. Its preservation is essential for the health of Ontarians now and in the future.

Ontario Liberals are leading the way in national pharmacare. Last year with OHIP+ we made the greatest step towards pharmacare in this country in a generation by covering children and youth under 25 for all prescription drugs. This year we've expanded that to Ontarians 65 and over. We are taking the burden of health care costs away from families in a historic way at a historic pace. Similar to the leadership role the Premier played in enhancing the Canada Pension Plan, Ontario Liberals continue to work collaboratively with federal, provincial and territorial partners and will advocate for a national pharmacare program to make prescription drugs accessible for all Canadians. No one should ever have to choose to between paying for their prescription or putting food on the table.

Ontario Liberals will continue to fight for historic programs like OHIP + and the services that all Ontarians need and deserve. That's why our Budget introduced the Drug and Dental Benefit Program. Under our new program, \$700 per year of dental costs is now covered for a family of four. That is going to cover 4 exams for a low or middle-income family without coverage with enough left over to pay for fillings or additional cleaning if needed. It's going to ensure those children know the value of growing up with good oral health the confidence of a good smile. This \$700 isn't just a savings for the family, it is an opportunity to for those children to have the confidence to grow up with good oral health.

Children need healthy food to support their physical and personal growth. Research shows that access to nutritious meals helps children learn, which is why the Ontario Liberal Party is proud of Ontario's Student Nutrition Program. This initiative helps provide healthy breakfasts, snacks and lunches to school-aged kids across the province. This funding helps schools, volunteers, local businesses, parents and charities to work together to provide healthy meals to kids. At the end of the last school year, more than 812,000 school-aged kids received nutritious breakfasts, snacks and lunches. Our government invests \$32.3 million annually to support the program. In the last budget, the Ontario Liberal government committed an additional \$1 million to support initiatives that improve access to healthy food, such as vegetables and fruit.

Ontario Liberals have made significant progress in this area, but all that is at risk in this election. The NDP have been unclear about what their approach would cover, and Doug Ford's PCs are hunting for billions of dollars in cuts to pay for tax cuts for their rich friends.

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