

Fall 2020 Budget Submission to the Ontario Ministry of Finance

Ontario Campaign 2000
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2020 Budget Recommendations

7 months into the pandemic, it is clear that not everyone in Ontario is experiencing the same pandemic. Health and income data along with countless personal stories have underscored how challenging life in the pandemic has been for people living in low income in Ontario, many of whom are First Nations, Métis, or Inuit people, single parents, newcomers, racialized people, people with disabilities, precariously housed people, or those fleeing violence.

Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 7 families with children lived in poverty in Ontario, a disproportionate number of which are single parent families led by women¹. Over 520,000 children in Ontario lived in poverty; a disproportionate number of whom are Black, Indigenous, and racialized². Children live in poverty because their families live in poverty. Without addressing the root causes of poverty and connecting the dots on the gendered and racialized impacts of the pandemic, decreasing these devastating numbers will be all the more difficult to do, and any gains in the reduction of child and family poverty will be quickly wiped away.

Though far from perfect, federal and provincial emergency interventions intended to flatten the curve earlier in the pandemic have shown that another world is possible. It should not have taken an international health crisis to unlock policy changes and additional financial supports for caregivers, low wage workers, and people receiving social assistance. There is much further to go. Interventions designed to protect and support families in the earlier part of the pandemic must be looked to as a base level from which to build lasting policy changes.

The government of Ontario must shoulder its responsibility in remedying the conditions that families living in low income face, and must continue to adequately and regularly invest in structural and direct supports to ensure families made vulnerable through their experience of poverty not only survive the pandemic but emerge from it without additional setbacks. We cannot slow down or change course on building a world free from poverty, even in a pandemic.

Ontario Campaign 2000 recommends that the Ontario government:

1. Make Policy and Funding Decisions Based on Ensuring the Needs of the Most Vulnerable are Met

- a. Implement Gender Based Analysis+ for all pandemic policies and programs. The pandemic must be beaten in every community.
- b. Collect disaggregated data at the provincial level, use this data to identify and support communities where infection rates are highest, and fund site-specific, community-led interventions to ensure improved access to testing and help reduce the infection rate.

2. Improve Income Security For the Long Term

- a. Accept the federal government's assessment that a minimum of \$2000/month is needed for individuals to make ends meet, and invest in increases to OW and ODSP until monthly

¹ Ontario Campaign 2000, "Make Child and Family Poverty History", April 2020.
https://ontariocampaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ONC2000-Make-Child-and-Family-Poverty-History-April-2020_May11.pdf

² Ibid

benefits are brought up to at least 10% above the LIM-AT threshold for that census family type³, ensuring that people living with disabilities have access to additional supports.

- b. Move away from providing a patchwork of discretionary emergency funds or one-time benefit bump-ups for families, and permanently increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB), making it accessible for all children in Ontario, regardless of immigration status.
- c. Remove immigration status barriers from eligibility for income supports so that all people in Ontario can access income security measures.
- d. Commit to ending clawbacks on federally funded emergency benefits for social assistance recipients. Prior to the pandemic, many social assistance recipients were forced to live far below the poverty line due to flat-lined benefits rates and earnings restrictions⁴. With reduced access to community supports and increased household costs, federally funded emergency benefits delivered to those receiving social assistance must remain intact.
- e. Support the call to the federal government to implement a CERB repayment amnesty for anyone living in low income who received CERB and was later deemed ineligible.

3. Ensure Equitable Access to the Public Education System and Safe, High Quality, Affordable Childcare

- a. Provide financial resources for schoolboards to sustain lower class sizes and adequately support families who've chosen virtual learning.
- b. Close the digital divide: work with municipalities and regional governments and telecoms across the province to provide heavily subsidized high-speed internet access for all residents living in low income regardless of their geographical location.
- c. Reverse course on proposed regulatory changes to the *Child Care and Early Years Act* that would place younger children in larger groups with fewer qualified staff. Medical professionals have routinely advocated for smaller group sizes to reduce the risk and rate of virus transmission. Increasing group sizes puts the health and safety of children and workers at risk.
- d. Implement base-funding to licensed centre-based care and home childcare agencies to ensure that childcare options remain accessible and affordable, allowing childcare workers to financially survive the pandemic as well.

4. Implement Labour Reforms to Keep Workers and their Families Safe

- a. Legislate 7 permanent employer-paid sick days, and an additional 14 employer-paid sick days during public health emergencies. People who cannot afford to lose income cannot

³ Campaign 2000 uses T1FF taxfiler data in its analysis. According to 2018 T1FF data, the after-tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CF-LIMAT) is \$21,833 per individual, and \$30,877 for two people (Table G, T1 Family File Final Estimates 2018, Technical Reference Guide, Catalogue #72-212-X, Statistics Canada, 2020). 10% above the CF-LIMAT threshold would be \$24,016 for a family of one, and \$33,964 for a family of two.

⁴ Ontario Campaign 2000, "Make Child and Family Poverty History", April 2020.

- stay home when they're sick and cannot afford gaps in income while waiting to receive temporary federal sick leave benefits.
- b. Improve employment standards so that low wage earners, many of whom are racialized women, can survive the pandemic. Ensure equal pay for equal work and increase the minimum wage to at least \$15/hr (with no exemptions for sector or age).
 - c. Ensure that employment standards cover gig workers in Ontario who continue to face unsafe working conditions, lower wages, and workplace abuse during the pandemic.
 - d. Pass employment equity and pay equity legislation in Ontario so that all vulnerable workers have equal access to the labour market, and are not left out of employment gains.
 - e. Support the call to the federal government to ensure all workers, including those without valid SIN numbers, are given access to new federal income supports. Workers who have faced delays in application or permit processing due to the pandemic should not be penalized through restricted access to emergency benefits.

5. Support Tenants and Precariously Housed People Through Ensuring Stable, Affordable Housing

- a. Re-introduce the moratorium on evictions and re-institute effective rent control. A rent freeze without an eviction freeze and coordinated steps to prevent evictions and maintain rent control on vacant units will do little to help families that have fallen behind on rent payments over the course of the pandemic.
- b. Amend the Residential Tenancies Act to provide direction to the Landlord Tenant Board to allow for additional review of mediated repayment agreements, ensuring tenants are not pushed into homelessness if circumstances change and they experience job loss or loss of income. Life changes may impact previously negotiated repayment agreements, and every effort must be made to keep people housed.

About Ontario Campaign 2000

Ontario Campaign 2000 is a provincial coalition of over 70 active partner organizations committed to eradicating child and family poverty in Ontario. Our membership is broad and diverse. It includes faith groups, members of the healthcare and community sectors serving children and families, educators, academics, and low income and working families from Thunder Bay to Peel Region to Windsor. For nearly 30 years, Campaign 2000 has carefully monitored poverty and related social policies at the federal and provincial levels through our annual report cards on child and family poverty.