



**FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO**  
For People. For Change.



# 2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

## Ontario Campaign 2000

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### **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, racialized communities, and low income and working families from Thunder Bay to Peel Region to Windsor. For nearly 30 years, Campaign 2000 has carefully monitored child poverty rates and related social policies at the federal and provincial levels through our annual report cards on child and family poverty. For more information, visit [www.ontariocampaign2000.ca](http://www.ontariocampaign2000.ca).

## Ontario Campaign 2000 Recommendations for Ontario Budget 2021:

1. Make Decisions Based on Meeting the Needs of the Most Vulnerable
2. Address the Financial Needs of Parents & Fortify the Childcare and Education Systems
3. Help Ontarians Stay Home
4. Solidify Safety Nets & Remove Barriers
5. Focus on Improving Employment Standards Alongside Job Creation

Ontarians are still grappling with the effects of the pandemic in real time. After a strong start to pandemic response in April 2020, the Fall budget focused heavily on supports for businesses. The federal government has provided much of the financial support to individuals, either directly to individuals or through transfers to the province. For many people living on low incomes in Ontario, the tapering off of individual federal supports and continued fluctuation in employment<sup>1</sup>, has created a worse situation today than earlier on in the pandemic.

Job losses have hit part-time and low wage workers in Ontario particularly hard<sup>2</sup>, many of whom are disproportionately Black and racialized women<sup>3</sup>. While job creation is important, investments in responsive provincial services and programs that support labour market participation will also be key for an inclusive recovery.

Based on data collected prior to the pandemic, the child poverty rate in Ontario has decreased marginally since 2013, but recent reductions have been disappointing – less than a percentage a year since 2015. The current child poverty rate is 18.0% (507,760 children)<sup>4</sup> under 18, and 19.5% (170,730 children)<sup>5</sup> under 6, with rates being higher, sometimes more than double, for Black, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and racialized children.<sup>6</sup>

Children experience poverty because their families experience poverty. The Ontario government must not sit back and leave federal emergency funds in the bank while children and families living on low incomes are suffering now. Budget 2021 must face this responsibility head-on and focus on providing support for families who were struggling prior to the pandemic and who have been made more vulnerable because of it. Making the right interventions now can help accelerate the rate of poverty reduction in Ontario and positively impact generations to come.

Ontario Campaign 2000 recommends that the Ontario government:

- 1. Make Policy and Funding Decisions Based on Meeting the Needs of the Most Vulnerable**
  - a) **Implement Intersectional Gender Based Analysis+ (including race equity)** for all pandemic policies, programs, and budgets.
  - b) **Collect disaggregated data** and use data to inform and support equitable program planning and funding.
- 2. Address the Financial Needs of Parents & Fortify the Childcare and Education Systems**
  - a) **Increase the Ontario Child Benefit for at least the duration of the pandemic.** The Ontario Support for Learners Fund was an important first investment, but families need sustained, predictable income supports to help offset the ongoing and increased costs of the pandemic. A top up to the Ontario Child

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey, January 2021. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210205/dq210205a-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi (2018). “Persistent Inequality: Ontario’s Colour-coded Labour Market”, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Pg 7.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, T1 Family Files. After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependents based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition. 2014-2018. Table: 11-10-0018-01 (formerly CANSIM 111-0046).

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, Custom Tabulation. T1 Family File, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Campaign 2000 (2020). “Beyond the Pandemic: Rising up for a Canada free of Poverty”.

Benefit in addition to temporary application-based income supports for families in need will have an immediate and positive impact on families living on low or fixed incomes.

- b) **Provide financial resources for schoolboards** to sustain lower class sizes, improve ventilation, provide on-site testing, and support the delivery of virtual learning programs, including technology infrastructure. For the long-term, modify the funding formula to improve sustained resourcing of a robust public education system.
- c) **Make investments now that move towards a publicly funded universal childcare system.** Increase general operating funding by \$500 million to stabilize the childcare sector. Immediately reverse \$49 million in planned cuts to childcare, which have only been offset but not cancelled. Well-funded, accessible, affordable childcare for all parents has not been permanently established, despite the quick set-up of limited access emergency childcare at points throughout the pandemic. With a childcare system that works for everyone, many parents will be able to return to work, in particular women, who are disproportionately affected by job losses and childcare duties.

### 3. Help Ontarians Stay Home

- a) **Take every effort to keep people housed.** Implement a moratorium on evictions until people have recovered from the pandemic. Improve the process by which virtual hearings are held including accessibility for those who do not have the technology to attend, and amend the *Residential Tenancies Act* to provide direction to the Landlord Tenant Board to allow for additional review of mediated repayment agreements. In the absence of the creation of a specific pandemic-related provincial rental supplement earlier in the pandemic, establish a fund to support tenants facing rental arrears.
- b) **Increase investments in municipal, regional, and First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban and rural Indigenous-led affordable housing initiatives** to ensure that new affordable housing units are built without delay, and that a significant number of units are dedicated to permanently housing women, children and Two Spirit Peoples fleeing violence. Implement zoning regulations that require private builders to create affordable housing in every development.

### 4. Solidify Safety Nets & Remove Barriers

- a) **Invest in rate increases to OW and ODSP** until all income benefits work together to bring incomes up to at least the LIM-AT<sup>7</sup>, ensuring that people who are not connected to the labour market are not pushed into poverty, and that people living with disabilities have access to additional supports. Ensure proper investment into Ontario's Social Benefits Tribunal, which governs the appeal process for social assistance in Ontario.
- b) **Close the digital divide.** Countless government and commercial services have moved online due to the pandemic, and those who do not have access to affordable highspeed internet face inequities in work, school, access to services and social opportunities. The province must work with municipalities, regional governments, Indigenous governments, and telecoms across the province to provide free high-speed internet access for all residents living on low incomes regardless of their geographical location.
- c) **Reinvest all clawed back Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) funds into social assistance programs.** The federal government designed the CERB for individuals, but the provincial government chose to clawback a percentage of CERB from social assistance clients who received the benefit. 100% of clawed-back funds must be directly returned to social assistance clients through transfers and programs.

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<sup>7</sup> Campaign 2000 uses T1FF taxfiler data in its analysis. According to 2018 T1FF data, the after-tax Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT) is \$21,833 per individual (Table G, T1 Family File Final Estimates 2018, Technical Reference Guide, Catalogue #72-212-X, Statistics Canada, 2020).

- d) **Ensure immigration status is not a barrier to eligibility for income supports or public health initiatives** so that all people in Ontario can access healthcare and income supports, during and after the pandemic.

**5. Focus on Improving Employment Standards Alongside Job Creation**

- a) **Legislate 7 permanent employer-paid sick days, and an additional 14 employer-paid sick days during public health emergencies.** The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit is a temporary, stop-gap measure – workers must have immediate access to employer-funded permanent sick days that are universal with no exemptions to workplace size or immigration status.
- b) **Increase the minimum wage** to at least \$15/hr with no exemptions for sector or age. “Pandemic pay” has come and gone in many cases, but dangerous and unstable working conditions due to the pandemic persist. Employers must ensure safe workplaces with decent wages.
- c) **Pass employment equity and pay equity legislation** in Ontario so that all workers have equitable access to the labour market and are not left out of employment gains. Investment in re-training and re-skilling programs is important but ensuring equitable access to employment in all fields is needed for a truly inclusive recovery.