



FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO
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2023 Ontario Budget Response

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.

The 2023 Ontario Provincial Budget, *Building a Strong Ontario*, offers relatively small increases in critical areas, resulting in a tremendous lack of meeting the needs of low-income families, children, workers, and the most marginalized communities in this province.

Ironically, the statement of *Working for you*, does very little for working and marginalized communities in Ontario.

As a coalition of frontline service agencies, we have seen firsthand the devastating effects of the pandemic on communities across Ontario. The 2023 Ontario budget does not address the needs of vulnerable communities across this province, nor does it offer any long-term sustainable solutions to reducing and eradicating family and child poverty in our lifetime.

Our pre-budget recommendation submission can be found here.

Decent Work & Equity in the Workplace

In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the following;

- a. Increase the minimum wage to at least \$20
- b. Close the gender gap
- c. Implement 10 permanent sick days

It is imperative that the Government of Ontario prioritize decent work and equity in the workplace, which would go a long way toward alleviating poverty. It is necessary to have an equitable increase to the minimum wage to at least \$20. Although the government announced outside of the budget release that there will be an increase in the minimum wage from \$15.50 to \$16.55/hour on Oct 1st, we know that this is nowhere close to an equitable living wage. Inflation has increased but wages have not increased accordingly.

We applaud that the budget noted that the provincial government will expand support for the Young Entrepreneurs program by providing an additional \$2 million in 2023-24 to Futurpreneur Canada, which will address unique economic barriers facing youth and women. However, we have seen time and time again that Indigenous women, racialized women, and women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the income gap. The Ontario 2023 budget makes no reference to wage disparities and to closing the gender pay gap as a primary economic barrier for diverse women.

The 2023 provincial budget did not address the longstanding call for ten employer-paid sick days, rather we saw the regressive move to remove the current three sick-day program. This leaves workers with a lack of basic labour protection.

The Needs of Parents & Fortifying the Childcare System

In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the following;

- a. Increase the financial assistance allotted for children in Ontario
- b. Address the childcare workforce crisis

\$13.2 billion has been jointly invested through the federal-provincial bilateral agreement on Early Learning and Childcare that has reduced parent fees by 50% in the last year. This budget re-commits to further reducing those fees to an average of \$10 per day, a significant gain for families who already had access to childcare. Of the 86,000 new childcare spaces the province has promised by December 2026, 33,000 new licensed childcare spaces have been created.

Despite the urgent call from advocates, staff and operators to address the childcare workforce crisis, the budget offers no changes to this problem. We commend the government's attempt to expand childcare spaces, but this will be futile without a workforce strategy focused on retention and the rights of childcare workers.

Of critical importance will be a plan to ensure access to children from low-income systemically marginalized communities. This plan must include a 0-\$10 a day sliding scale model, where \$10 is the maximum childcare model as proposed in the Campaign 2000 annual report cards. \$10 a day childcare is out of reach for many families on low income. Childhood poverty is linked to ill health and negative developmental outcomes. However, studies show that access to high-quality early learning and childcare can act as protective factors from the harmful effects of poverty and as equalizers, improving long-term developmental and employment outcomes for children. It will be essential for the province to create an expansion plan that ensures access to the new early learning and childcare system without discrimination for children from systemically marginalized groups, including children with disabilities, without permanent immigration status, who are First Nations, Inuit and Métis, Black, racialized and newcomers, and all low-income children.

Making Policy & Funding Decisions Based on Meeting the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the following;

- a. Implement an intersectional and human rights-based analysis
- b. Collect disaggregated data

Campaign 2000 called for the implementation of an intersectional and human rights-based analysis framework when developing policies and budgets. Yet, there was no mention of the implementation of an intersectional framework nor a commitment to the collection of disaggregated data that would aid in providing an understanding of critical areas/communities that need to be prioritized.

We commend the government's commitment to increasing supportive housing for Ontario's most vulnerable and the province's investment of an additional \$15 million over three years for the Racialized and Indigenous Support for Entrepreneurs (RAISE) grant program that includes support for Indigenous, Black and other racialized people. Programs such as these are vital for uplifting marginalized communities, but there is still a need for a disaggregated data collection and intersectional analysis across all budget investments, program implementation and evaluation to prioritize and meet the needs of Ontario's marginalized communities.

Develop & Implement an Equitable Housing Strategy

In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the following;

- a. Investment into the construction of affordable rental properties
- b. Increase the supply of supportive housing
- c. Fund programs that prevent unlawful evictions
- d. Develop an urban, rural & northern Indigenous housing strategy

Campaign 2000, alongside many housing advocates, recommended that there should be an investment into the construction of affordable rental properties to ensure affordable housing for low- and middle-income families. The Provincial government must prioritize and support the nonprofit and co-op housing sector to invest in the construction and development of community housing that would remain affordable in the long term. This must be coupled with an investment into a long-term Portable Housing Benefit that would ensure marginalized communities can maintain their housing as rent increases.

In regards to increasing the supply of supportive housing, we commend the province on its announcement of investing \$202 million each year in Homelessness prevention programs and Indigenous supportive housing programs. As the homelessness and mental health crisis grows in this province, this was a critical step for the government to take to provide adequate shelters and supports for those unhoused and in need of critical mental health services. Unfortunately, there was no mention of developing an urban, rural and northern Indigenous housing strategy required to address the housing needs and systemic inequities facing Indigenous communities in Ontario.

The province has agreed to invest \$24 million over three years to clear long-standing backlogs at the Landlord Tenant board. However, without interventions that include strengthening the Residential Tenancies Act, significant rent control and penalties for illegal evictions, renters and tenants will not be able to attain secure and affordable housing and this move will only serve to help landlords.

Solidify Safety Nets & Remove Barriers

In our pre-budget submission, we recommended the following;

- a. Substantially invest in rate increases in Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- b. Reinvest all clawed-back CERB and CRB funds into social assistance programs
- c. Ensure immigration status is not a barrier to eligibility for income supports or public health

The budget included a \$1.4 billion commitment to index Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to inflationary increases over the next three years, which supports the announcement put forward by the province in August 2022. Unfortunately, this is an underwhelming increase as the base amount was already insufficient and far below the poverty line.

There was no change for the 400,000 Ontarians that access Ontario Works (OW) social assistance. The maximum amount a single adult on OW receives is \$733/month, an amount that has not increased since 2018. This leaves social assistance recipients in legislated poverty, which constitutes a violation of their

human rights to an adequate standard of living. We urge the province to immediately increase both OW and ODSP so that these programs work together with other available benefits to bring incomes up to the Low Income Measure. Additionally, we echo the recommendation from the ODSP Action Coalition to implement an overpayment amnesty for any social assistance clients who may have received federal-related pandemic benefits and subsequently were deemed ineligible for the federal benefit.

Campaign 2000 recommended that the Provincial Government must ensure that immigration status is not a barrier to the eligibility of public health initiatives. Unfortunately, there was no reference to this in this year's budget release. All people in Ontario, regardless of immigration status require access to health care. Currently, people without status face many obstacles in attaining minimum healthcare in Ontario, including access to Ontario Health Insurance Plan coverage (OHIP). The province must work with the Ministry of Health to guarantee that healthcare is not a barrier for those trying to access their basic rights.