



FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO
For People. For Change.



2023 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.

Ontario Campaign 2000 Recommendations for Ontario Budget 2023:

1. Decent Work & Equity in the Workplace
2. Immediately Address the Needs of Parents & Fortify Childcare Systems
3. Make Policy & Funding Decisions Based on Meeting the Needs of the Most Vulnerable
4. Develop & Implement an Equitable Housing Strategy
5. Solidify Safety Nets & Remove Barriers

As a coalition of frontline service agencies, we have seen first-hand the devastating effects of the pandemic on communities across Ontario. The 2023 Budget must address the needs of vulnerable communities across this province. Federal pandemic income support measures reduced poverty for low-income workers who could access those benefits, however, there was no additional support provided for people who rely on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In September 2022, the provincial government increased ODSP rates by five percent, providing a total of \$1227 per month for individuals. This amount remains completely inadequate, the benefit is not indexed to inflation, nor does it lift families and individuals out of poverty. Of concern is the lack of any increase to the OW program. For many people living on low incomes in Ontario, the end of federal pandemic supports, insufficient minimum wages and record-high inflation is sending individuals and families into crisis. The rate of inflation in Ontario reached 6.9% in 2022¹ and as a result, food and housing insecurity are becoming even more of a widespread crisis.

Children and families who got a slight break from the ongoing effects of poverty in 2020 at the start of the pandemic are more likely to be struggling again. Data from 2021 suggests that 16.1% of households in Ontario are food insecure². As food insecurity increases, a family's ability to attain necessities like housing and medication are also compromised.

For many, the job market continues to be a primary barrier. Low wages, unequal pay for equal work, discrimination and a lack of basic benefits like paid sick days are adding to keeping families and workers in a state of outright poverty. Job losses have hit part-time and low-wage workers in Ontario particularly hard, many of whom are disproportionately Black and racialized women³. While job creation is important, investments in responsive provincial services and programs that support labour market participation will also be key for supporting families.

Children experience poverty because their families experience poverty. The Ontario government must not sit back and leave children and families living on low incomes to suffer. Budget 2023 must face its responsibility to everyone in Ontario head-on and focus on supporting families who were struggling before the pandemic and were made more vulnerable because of it. Learning from the pandemic and 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. Prioritize Decent Work and Equity in the Workplace

- a) **Increase the minimum wage** to at least \$20 per hour and consider the implementation of a living wage across regions. The difference between \$20 and the current wage would lift many out of poverty. Inflation has increased but wages have not increased accordingly.

¹ Statistics Canada, Table 18-10-0004-01 "Consumer Price Index, not seasonally adjusted," 2022, www150.statcan.gc.ca.

²Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).

³ Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi. (2018). "Persistent Inequality: Ontario's Colour-coded Labour Market," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Pg 7.

- b) **Close the gender pay gap** to reduce the level of poverty amongst women. Indigenous women, racialized women and women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the income gap. Pay equity legislation is needed so that all workers have equitable access to the labour market and are paid accordingly.
- c) **Implement 10 permanent sick days** for all workers in the province of Ontario. Federal legislation Bill C-3 allows for industries covered by Federal labour laws to have access to 10 paid sick days. The Province of Ontario must follow suit and implement similar legislation for workers in Ontario.

2. Immediately Address the Needs of Parents & Fortify Childcare Systems

- a) **Increase the financial assistance allotted for children in Ontario** like the Ontario Child Benefit, Ontario Child Disability Benefit and Transition Child Benefit. Benefits such as these are key to eliminating child and family poverty in this province, and research shows that income transfers such as these result in better health and well-being for children⁴.
- b) **Address the childcare workforce crisis** as Ontario's childcare programs cannot operate at capacity due to recruitment and retention shortage. Although the Federal and Provincial governments have agreed to reduce childcare fees by 50%, this will not be effective without implementing a workforce strategy focused on retention and the rights of childcare workers. As fees are reduced, demand for space will increase. The Ontario government must develop a strategy to address demand and expansion. All expansion must be public and not-for-profit.

3. Make Policy & Funding Decisions Based on Meeting the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

- a) **Implement an Intersectional and Human Rights Based Analysis** to inform all policies, programs and budget decision-making.
- b) **Collect disaggregated data** and use that data to inform and support equitable program planning and funding. Augment quantitative data with meaningful, frequent and ongoing community consultation with people affected by poverty.

4. Develop & Implement an Equitable Housing Strategy

- a) **Investment into the construction of affordable rental properties** that will ensure affordable housing for low- and middle-income families. Prioritize the construction of non-market affordable housing over luxury rentals that are unattainable to low- and middle-income individuals and families with government-mandated conditions.
- b) **Increase the supply of Supportive Housing.** As the homelessness and mental health crisis grow in this province, it is imperative that the province works with necessary ministries to provide adequate and stable shelters and supports for those that are unhoused and dealing with mental health crises.
- c) **Fund programs that prevent unlawful evictions.** We support Ontario for All's recommendation to support efforts to enforce eviction laws and implement programs that prevent unlawful

⁴ Milligan, Kevin, and Mark Stabile. (2011) "Do Child Tax Benefits Affect the Well-Being of Children? Evidence from Canadian Child Benefit Expansions." *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3 (3): 175-205.

evictions. The current rent control system in the province does not protect affordability once a unit is vacant, resulting in the evictions of new tenants that are not able to afford exuberant rental rates⁵. Enforcing eviction laws and protecting the rights of tenants will preserve affordability.

- d) **Develop an Urban, Rural & Northern Indigenous Housing Strategy** led by Indigenous communities across the province. Investment in Indigenous housing must be a priority by the Provincial and Federal government to address the housing needs and systemic inequities facing Indigenous communities.

5. Solidify Safety Nets & Remove Barriers

- a) **Substantially invest in rate increases to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)** and ensure all income benefits work together to bring incomes up to at least the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT)⁶. People who are not connected to the labour market must not be pushed into poverty with inadequate income supports and people living with disabilities must be able to meet all of their needs with additional supports. Ensure proper investment into Ontario's Social Benefits Tribunal, which governs the appeal process for social assistance in Ontario.
- b) **Reinvest all clawed-back Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) funds into social assistance programs.** The federal government designed the CERB and CRB for individuals, but the provincial government chose to claw back a significant percentage of CERB and CRB from social and disability assistance recipients, despite urging from the federal Minister of Employment and Workforce Development and community advocates. 100% of clawed-back funds must be reinvested into social assistance programs.
- c) **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. Immigrants and refugees face a multitude of barriers when trying to attain the bare minimum of health care in Ontario. Several health issues are not covered by OHIP; hence many must opt for private insurance, unfortunately, private insurance is expensive, and many cannot afford to get it.

⁵ Ontario for All. "GTA Nonprofit Sector Joint 2023 Ontario Budget Submission"

⁶ Statistics Canada (2022). Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors. T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2020, Table F.