2026 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Ontario

The Price of Neglect: A Growing Crisis for Children and Families



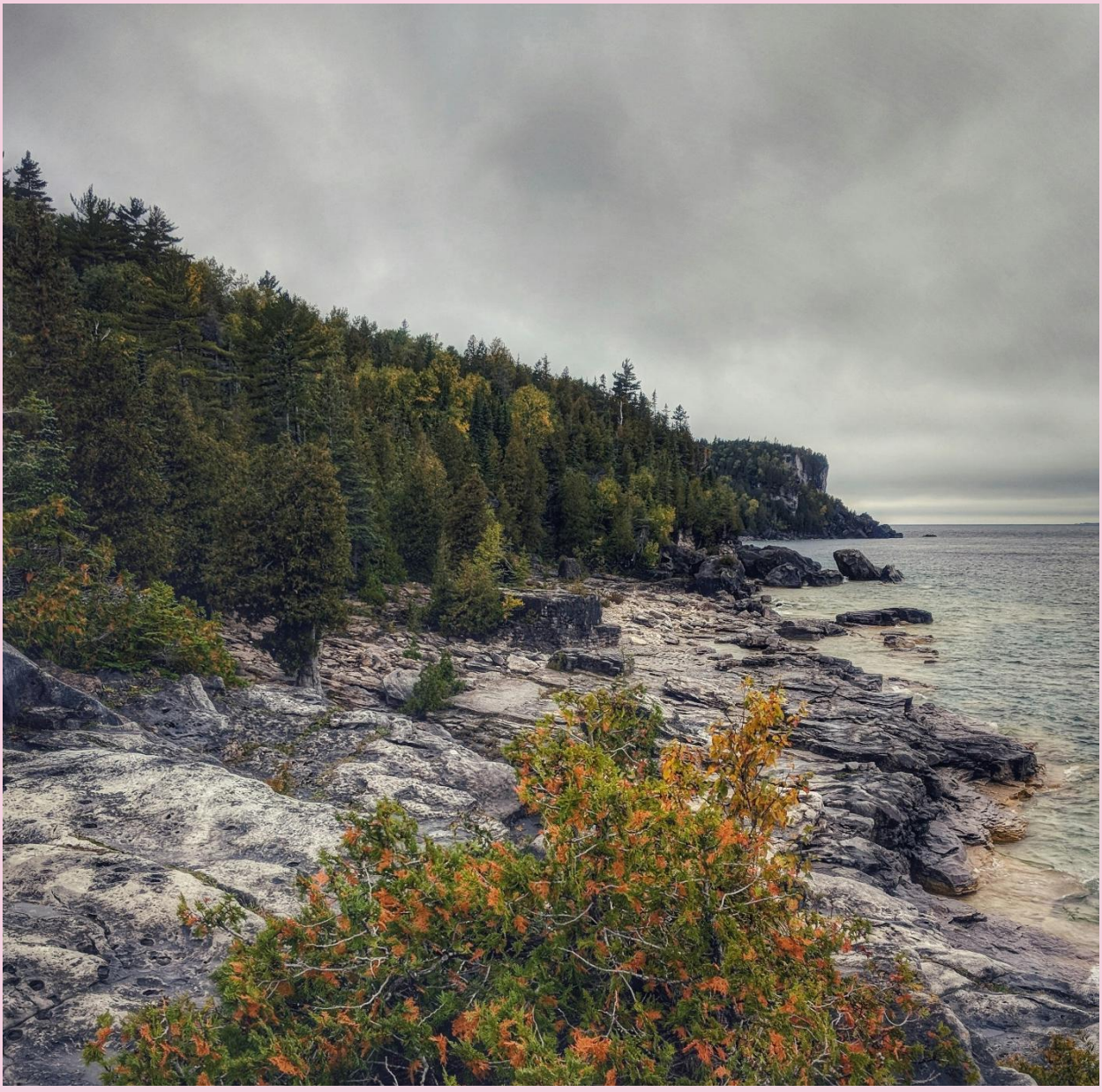
ONTARIO CAMPAIGN 2000 END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY

FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO For People. For Change.

United Way Greater Toronto

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Campaign 2000 acknowledges the traditional and ancestral territories we work on and commits to actions of reconciliation in our work. We acknowledge the inherent rights of First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples and the treaty rights, title and jurisdiction of all First Nation, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Ontario and across the country. We will continue to join with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples in the work of decolonization, to advocate for the changes needed to uphold rights and to build a society based on reconciliation, equity, justice, respect and self-determination where all communities can thrive.



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Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan, cross-Canada coalition of national, provincial, territorial and community organizations committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Canada, with over 70 partners based in Ontario.

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Authors: Leila Sarangi, David Safi and Laura Buccioni

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Charts and Tables: Alan Meisner, David Safi and Leila Sarangi

Cover and Design: Laura Buccioni, Ligia Hendry, Mariam Mumin

Translation: Jocelyne Tougas

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INTRODUCTION

Child poverty in Ontario is at a crisis. It is growing and deepening and it costs us all.

This annual 2026 Ontario Campaign 2000 Child and Family poverty report card, ***The Price of Neglect: A Growing Crisis for Children and Families***, uses the latest available tax filer data from 2023. It found that of the 2.8 million people living in poverty in Ontario, 565,440 were children.

2023 was the third consecutive year of increases in child poverty. One in five children in Ontario are living with the short- and long-term harms of not having enough to meet their basic needs. Child poverty was above pre-pandemic levels, eroding earlier gains seen from the implementation of the Canada Child Benefit.

This report card also found poverty deepening for families. On average families were falling more than $15,000 below the low income threshold. This depth has been growing since 2020.

While children in families fell further behind, incomes at the top were climbing. The top 10% of families held 22.8 time the income of the bottom 10%.

Poverty is profoundly unequal, disproportionately affecting groups who face systemic marginalization, discrimination and the lasting harms of historic and ongoing colonization. Indigenous children, racialized children, immigrant and newcomer children, those with disabilities, those in female led lone parent and youth who do not live in families face higher rates of poverty, deeper depths of poverty and greater barriers to the supports and services they need.

It does not have to be this way. Ontario Campaign 2000 believes in connected communities, with housing, child care, education and health care within reach of every family. It believes in decent work that lets people and families do more than get by. And we believe this vision is possible. Every year of delay is a year of childhood that cannot be given back.

The province's poverty reduction strategy has expired. At the time of this writing, we are still waiting for the government's new plan, which legislation requires on a five-year cycle. Children cannot wait for the next plan. The cost of neglect compounds with every passing year, and as does the return on investment. We urge the government to invest now, in income security, housing, child care and decent work, because the price of neglect is paid by children, and ultimately by us all.

2023 was the third consecutive year of increases in child poverty. One in five children in Ontario are living with the short- and long-term harms of not having enough to meet their basic needs.

KEY FINDINGS

CHILD POVERTY BY THE NUMBERS

- 565,440 Ontario children lived in poverty in 2023, or one in five (19.9%).
- 2023 was the third year of consecutive increases of child poverty in Ontario, doubling the annual growth seen in the national average.
- Ontario experienced the second-largest provincial increase between 2022 and 2023, a rise of 0.4 percentage points, behind only Quebec (0.7 points). The increase in Ontario is double the national increase of 0.2 percentage points.

WHERE CHILD POVERTY IS HIGHEST

- Windsor (23.7%), St. Catherines-Niagara (22.1%), London (22%), Toronto (21.7%), Thunder Bay (21.4%) and Brantford (20.1%) CMAs all had child poverty rates above the provincial average.

DISPROPORTIONATE CHILD POVERTY RATES

- Nearly one in two children in lone parent families, which are primarily female-led, lived in poverty (46.6%).
- Nearly all older children who did not live with parents or grandparents lived in poverty (98.8%).
- Nearly half of children living on First Nation reserves in Ontario lived in poverty (45.4%).
- Poverty disproportionately affects racialized and newcomer children.
- Children with developmental disabilities and their families are pushed into deeper poverty by barriers and compounding challenges to accessing timely services.

LONE PARENT FAMILIES

- Female led lone parents had the lowest average income across all deciles.
- Lone parents were nearly four time more likely than couple families to receive social assistance (23.2% compared with 6% respectively).

INCOME AND INEQUALITY

- Families with low-income were falling further behind. They needed $15,119 additional annual income to bring them up to the low income threshold, a gap that widened by more than $4,600 between 2020 and 2023.
- The rate of working poverty nearly doubled from 2020 to 2023, to 7.3%, growing faster than the national average and exceeding pre-pandemic levels.
- Income inequality is wide. The top 10% of families had 22.8 times the income of the bottom 10%. Ontario's gap is wider than the national ratio of 19.2.

BARRIERS TO SUPPORT KEEP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN POVERTY

- Social assistance programs keep families with children in legislated deep poverty.
- The $22/day child care fee cap remains out of reach for low income families.
- Housing affordability continues to be a major driver of child and family poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite some investments, data shows that the Province of Ontario has made little progress alleviating child poverty. The recommendations put forth our last report card, the ***2024 Child and Family Poverty Report Card, Tackling Poverty: A Call for Bold Solutions***, remain relevant and urgent, and are summarized below.

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUTH

- Prioritize the wellbeing of children and youth through coordinated, whole-of-government approaches, including establishing a non-partisan All-Party Standing Committee on Children and Youth.
- End waitlists and ensure equitable access to fully funded, community-based systems supporting mental health, developmental services and education infrastructure.
- Remove financial barriers to post-secondary education and alleviate student debt.

FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

- Recognize food insecurity as a symptom of poverty and economic insecurity, and the connection to public policy that promotes income adequacy, stability, and responsiveness to cost-of-living pressures.
- Support food sovereignty by investing in resilient, sustainable, and locally informed food systems, and regional agricultural policymaking.

DECENT WORK FOR ALL

- Raise Ontario's minimum wage to at least $20 an hour with a clear pathway to regional living wages to lift families out of poverty.
- Fund tailored community-based employment programs for women and gender-diverse people who have experienced violence and are seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce.
- Pass and enforce strong provincial labour laws to stop wage theft and unfair contractor labels. Hold companies at the top responsible for unpaid wages across their supply chains and give the government the power to inspect workplaces, fine employers who break the rules and recover stolen wages for workers.
- Uphold workers' rights, protections by protecting workers against reprisal should they seek accountability from their employers.
- Enable access to modernized Employment Insurance (EI) by addressing worker misclassification and reducing barriers.

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HOUSING

- Invest in a coordinated, rights-based provincial housing strategy that applies a gender-based plus (GBA+) analysis, prioritizes meaningful consultation with tenants and increases the availability of and access to adequate housing that meets their needs.
- Substantially increase funding for violence against women shelters, transition housing and supportive housing programs for homeless women and gender diverse people and those who have experienced gender-based violence.

- Preserve, acquire and build 143,225 accessible homes permanently designated as non-market by 2030, including 40,000 supportive homes, in partnership with public, non-profit and co-op providers.
- Designate and allocate increased, sustainable funds for present and future rent-geared-to-income (RGI) subsidies and expand access to adequate Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB).
- Improve access to justice for tenants by making meaningful reforms to the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB), expanding access and choice regarding hearings, prioritizing tenant applications, adequately funding legal aid, establishing landlord licensing, and proactively enforcing repair and accessibility and comfort standards.
- Build a timely, centralized and publicly accessible data system for adequate, data- and tenant-informed housing indicators that track the progressive realization of adequate housing.

STRENGTHENING CHILD CARE

- Cap child care fees at $10 a day and introduce a sliding fee scale down to $0 for lower-income families.
- In full consultation with the child care community, develop and implement a workforce strategy that centres decent work and pay for early childhood educators and other child care workers, aiming to solve the staffing shortages that prevent the full expansion of quality child care that children and families need.
- Develop and implement a publicly led, proactive expansion strategy to grow high-quality public and non-profit child care by building on municipally operated programs, strengthening the non-profit sector's capacity to scale up, and removing current local and provincial barriers to public and non-profit expansion.

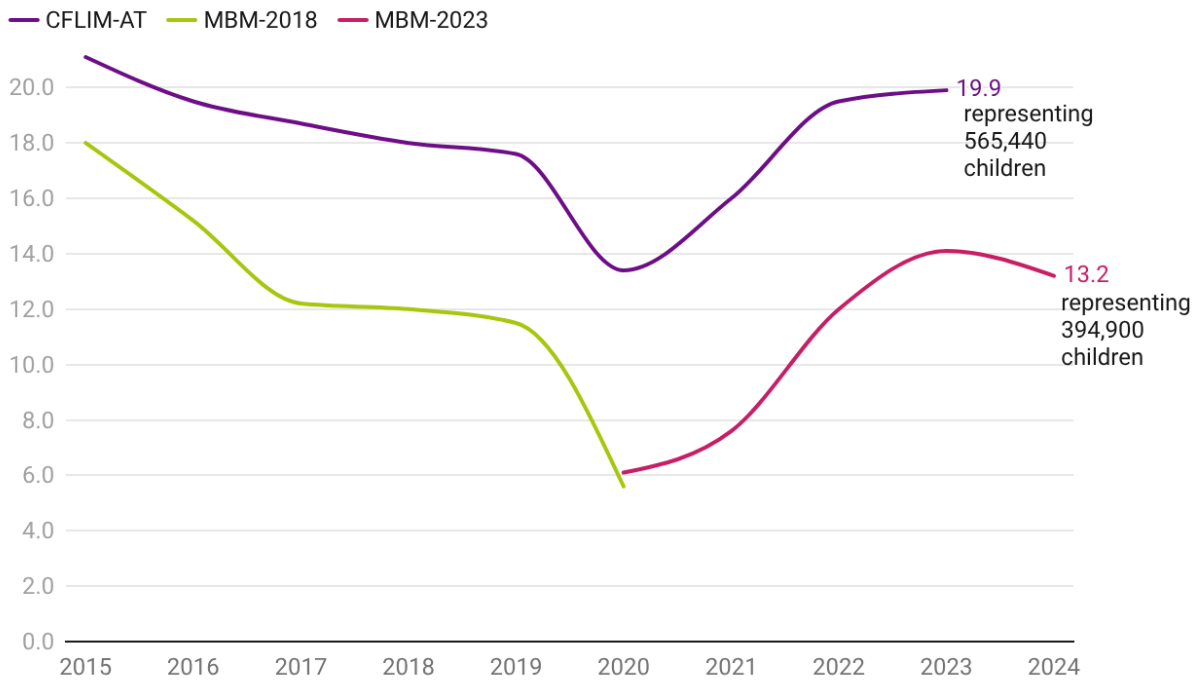
INCOME SECURITY AND POVERTY ELIMINATION

- Strengthen income security systems by immediately and significantly increasing Ontario Works (OW0 and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates so that social assistance recipients can keep pace with the cost of living and meeting their basic needs with dignity.
- Increase the OW monthly earnings exemption from $200 to $1,000 while keeping the 50% clawback rate. This would let recipients keep more of what they earn, strengthen their attachment to the labour market and move towards financial independence.
- Increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) and Transition Child Benefit (CDB) amounts, and ensure all children have adequate, barrier-free access to these and the Canada Child Benefit (CCB).
- Update the provincial poverty reduction strategy to include specific, evidence-based targets, timelines and indicators that apply to marginalized communities who face disproportionate rates of poverty, including lone mothers, young children living alone, Indigenous, racialized and newcomer children and children with disabilities.
- Invest in robust and client-centred life stabilization supports and implement transparent, evidence-based employment services.

MEASURING POVERTY

This report card relies primarily on poverty as measured by the Census Family Low Income Threshold, After Tax (CFLIM-AT), which is calculated with annual tax filer data and updated annually. The CFLIM-AT threshold is established at 50% of the national median and adjusted by family size; an individual or family's after-tax income that falls below the threshold is considered to be living in low income.

Figure 1. Number and percent of children in poverty, MBM-2018, MBM-2023 and CFLIM-AT, Ontario, 2015 to 2023



Sources: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition and Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0093-01 Poverty and low-income statistics by selected demographic characteristic.*

The Market Basket Measure (MBM) is Canada's official poverty line. The threshold is calculated by costing out a basket of goods and services by geography that an individual or family would need to purchase to have a 'basic' or 'modest' standard of living. These baskets comprise food, clothing, shelter, transportation and a basket of 'other' items, such as gifts, reading materials and toys for children. The MBM is annually adjusted using the Consumer Price Index and rebased every five years. In the 2023 update of the MBM, a sixth basket for communications was added. If a family is unable to afford the basket of goods and services for their region with their disposable income, they are considered to be living in poverty.

The MBM is calculated with data collected in the annual Canadian Income Survey, a smaller data set than the tax file. It excludes people living on First Nation reserves, in remote settings and in

congregate settings such as hospitals. The CFLIM-AT by comparison, reflects the income situation of anyone who filed their personal income taxes in that year. In 2023 that reflected 75.9% of the population in Canada.[i] Both data sets have a two-year release lag, with the exception of the 2024 tax filer data, which is not expected to be released until 2027.

The most recent data available is the MBM (2023 base). According to this poverty measure, 13.2% of children in Ontario lived in poverty in 2024, representing 394,000 children. The rate decreased slightly from the year prior by 0.9 percentage points, representing 14,400 children lifted out of poverty.

The most recent data for the CFLIM-AT is for the year 2023. According to this broader measure, 19.9% of children in Ontario lived in low income families, representing 565,440 children.

Table 1. Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) thresholds by family size, 2023

Number of family members	Threshold
1	26,442
2	37,395
3	45,799
4	52,884
5	59,126
6	64,769
7	69,959
8	74,789
9	79,326
10	83,617

Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors. T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2023.*

Table 2. Market Basket Measure thresholds, 2023 base, by MBM region, Ontario, 2024

Geography	1 person	2 persons	3 persons	4 persons	5 persons
Ontario, rural	26,024	36,803	45,075	52,048	58,191
Ontario, population under 30,000	25,908	36,639	44,874	51,816	57,932
Ontario, population 30,000 to 99,999	25,024	35,389	43,343	50,048	55,955
Ontario, population 100,000 to 499,999	26,847	37,967	46,500	53,694	60,032
Ontario, population 500,000 and over	27,185	38,445	47,085	54,369	60,786
Ottawa-Gatineau, Ontario part, Ontario/Quebec	28,856	40,809	49,980	57,712	64,524
Hamilton/Burlington, Ontario	29,198	41,292	50,572	58,396	65,289
Toronto, Ontario	30,882	43,673	53,488	61,763	69,053

Source: *Statistics Canada. (2026). Canadian Income Survey. Table: 11-10-0104-01 Market Basket Measure thresholds by Market Basket Measure region and family size, in current dollars*.

CHILD POVERTY IN ONTARIO

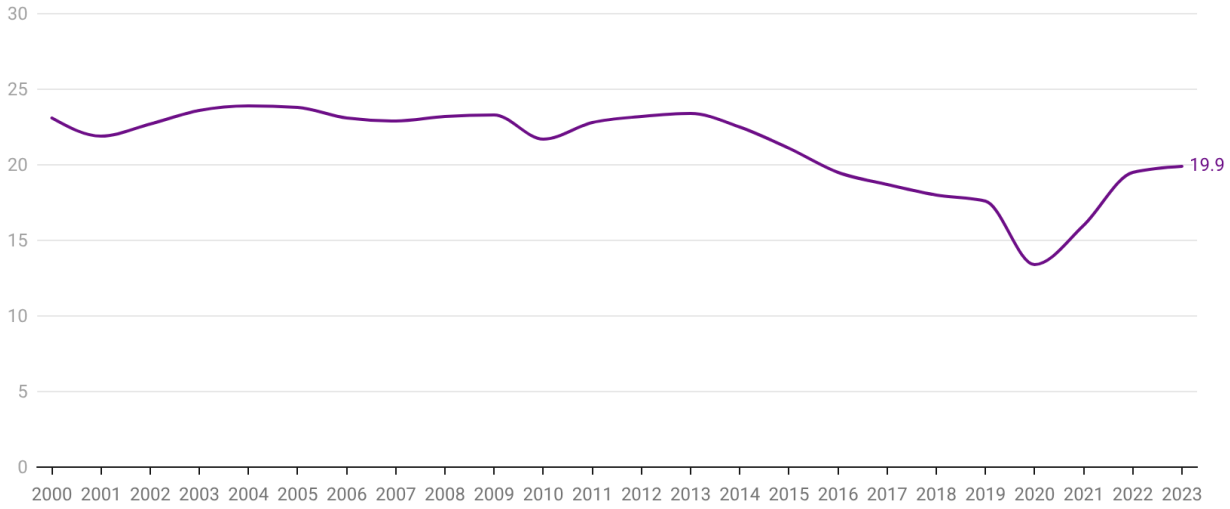


Child poverty increased for the third year in a row

In Ontario, 19.9% of children under the age of 18 lived in low income, representing 565,440 children, or one in five. This marks the third consecutive year of rising child poverty. The child poverty rate increased by 0.4 percentage points and represents 15,360 children falling into poverty in one year.

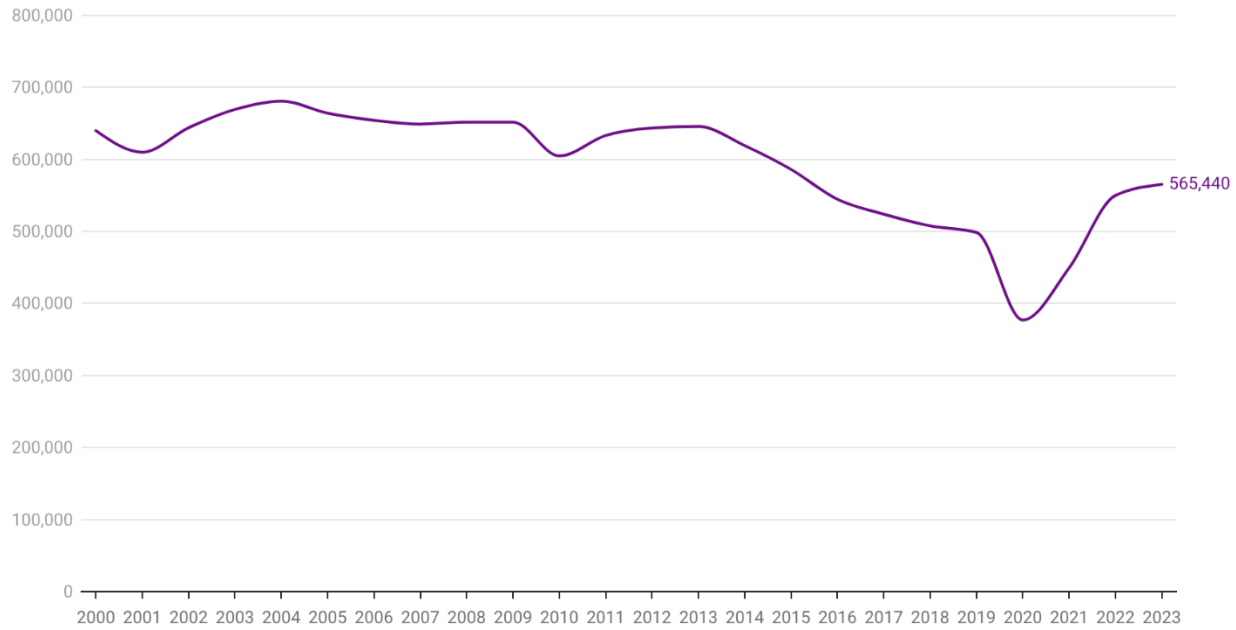
Child poverty was at its lowest rate in 2020, at 13.4%, but has skyrocketed since the pandemic, increasing 6.5 percentage points between 2020 and 2023. Much of the increase occurred in 2021 and 2022, with a slighter increase in 2023. **Ontario child poverty rates are now back to levels not seen since 2016, eroding earlier gains** including those seen from the implementation of the Canada Child Benefit.

Figure 2. Percent of children in low income, Ontario, under 18, 2000 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Figure 3. Number of children in low income, Ontario, under 18, 2000 to 2023

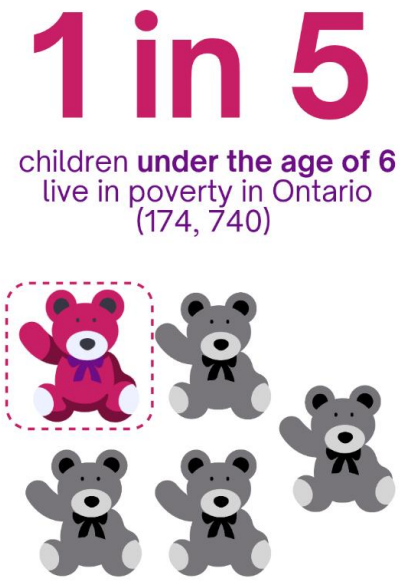


Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Child poverty has skyrocketed since 2020, increasing 6.5 percentage points between 2020 and 2023.

Children under six continue to face higher poverty rates

In 2023, 20.6% of young children lived in poverty (176,800 children). Between 2018 and 2023, their poverty rate rose by 1.1 percentage points, including a 0.2 percentage point increase from 2022 to 2023. Although annual increases are smaller than for the broader under 18 population, the under-six group consistently faces disproportionately higher rates.



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.*

Figure 4. Percent of children in low income, Ontario, under 6, 2018 to 2023

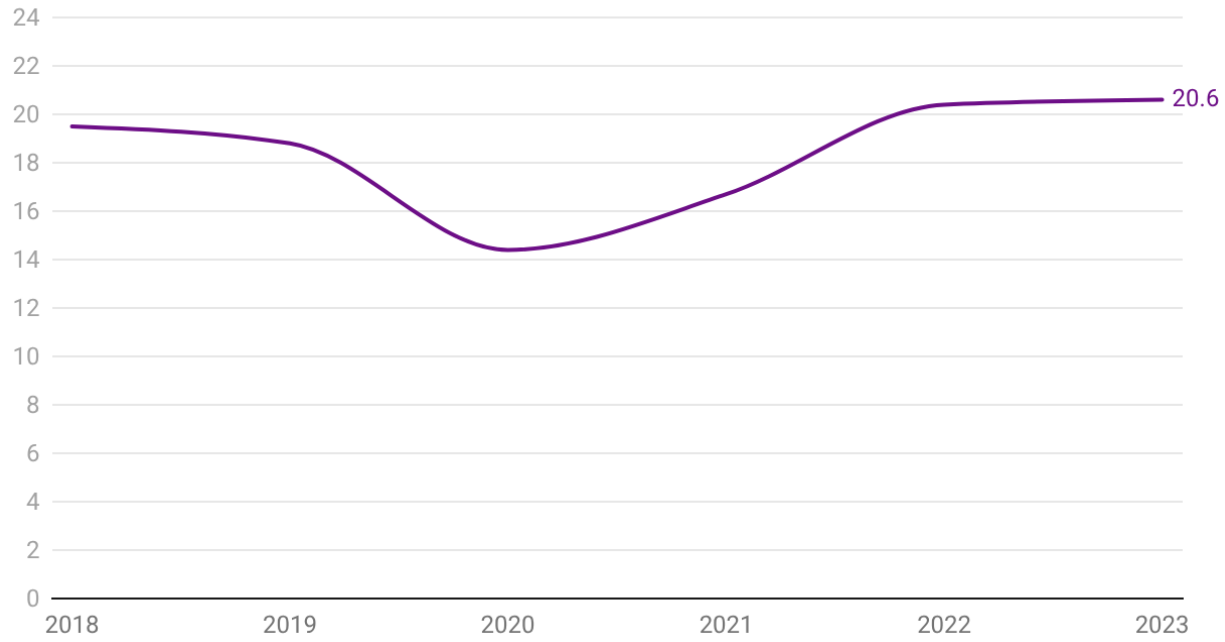


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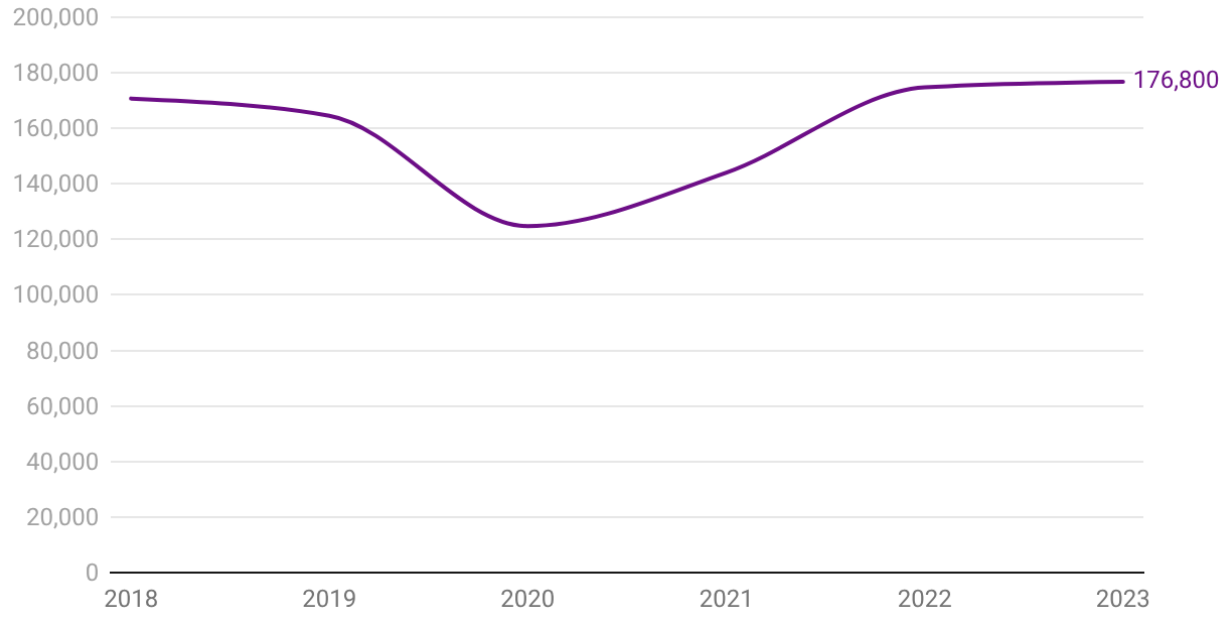
Figure 5. Number of children in low income, Ontario, under 6, 2018 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.*

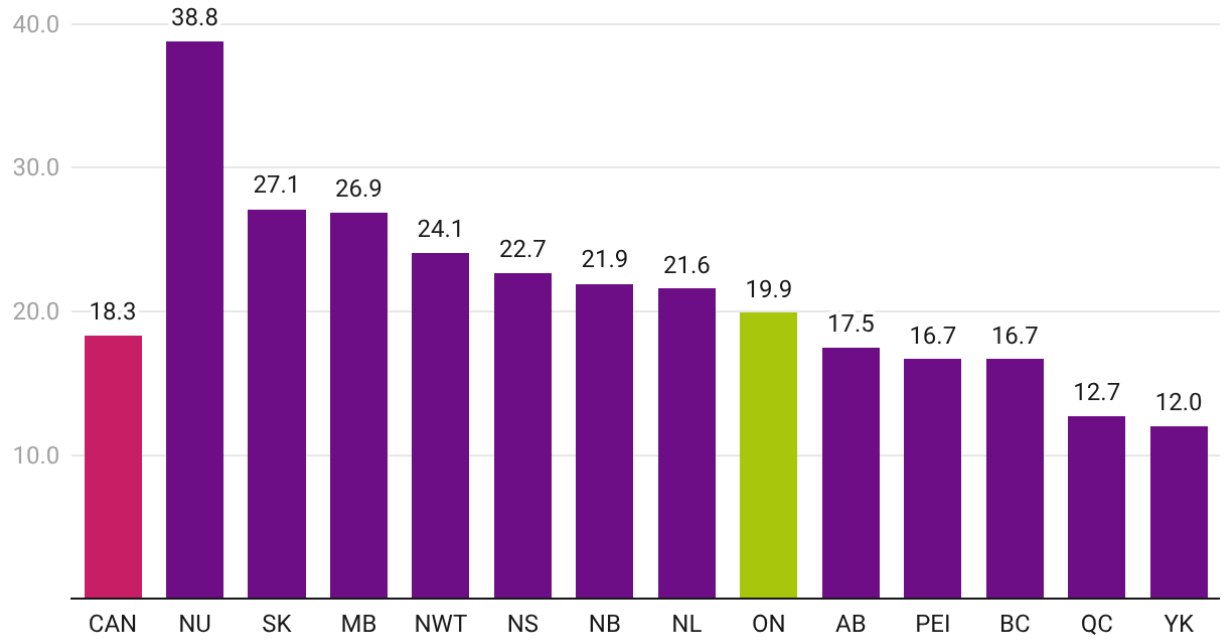
Ontario child poverty rising faster than the national average

In Canada, 18.3% of children lived in poverty in 2023, or nearly 1.4 million children.

Ontario is one of six provinces and two territories with child poverty rates above the national level, and one of only four provinces where child poverty increased in the past year. **Ontario experienced the second-largest provincial increase between 2022 and 2023**, a rise of 0.4 percentage points, behind only Quebec (0.7 points). **The increase in Ontario is double the national increase of 0.2 percentage points.**

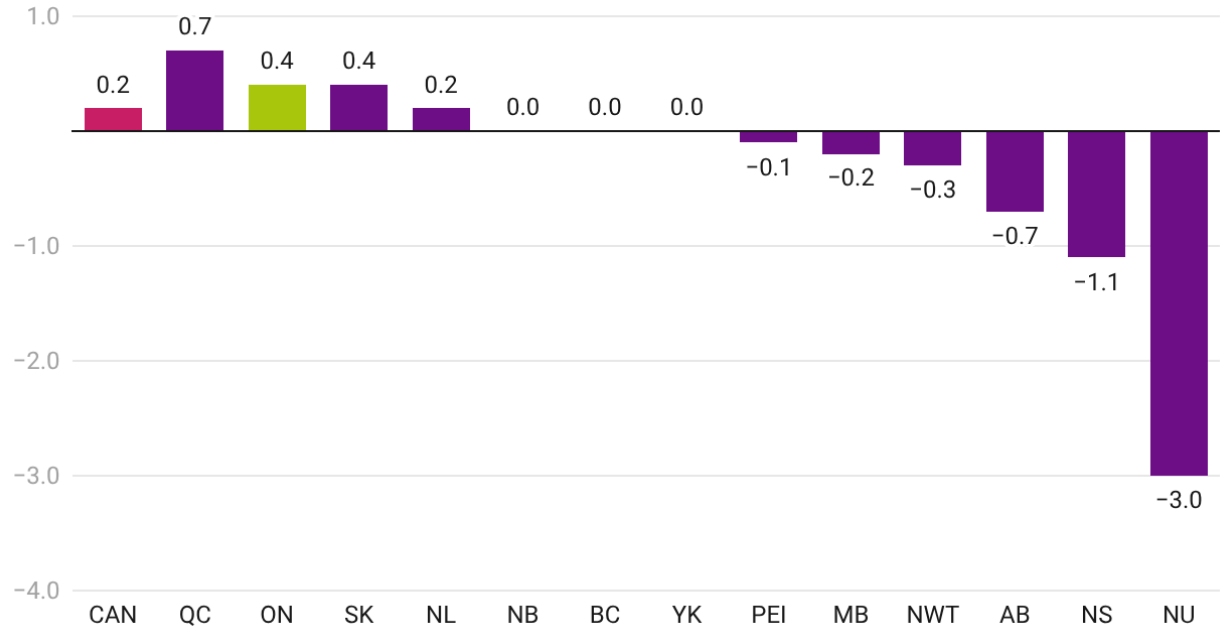
Ontario's child poverty rates tend to track the national rate, however, recent growth in child poverty has outpaced the national rate. This is a concern as 40% of children who live in low income in Canada reside in Ontario.

Figure 6. Percent of children in low income by province and territory, under 18, 2023



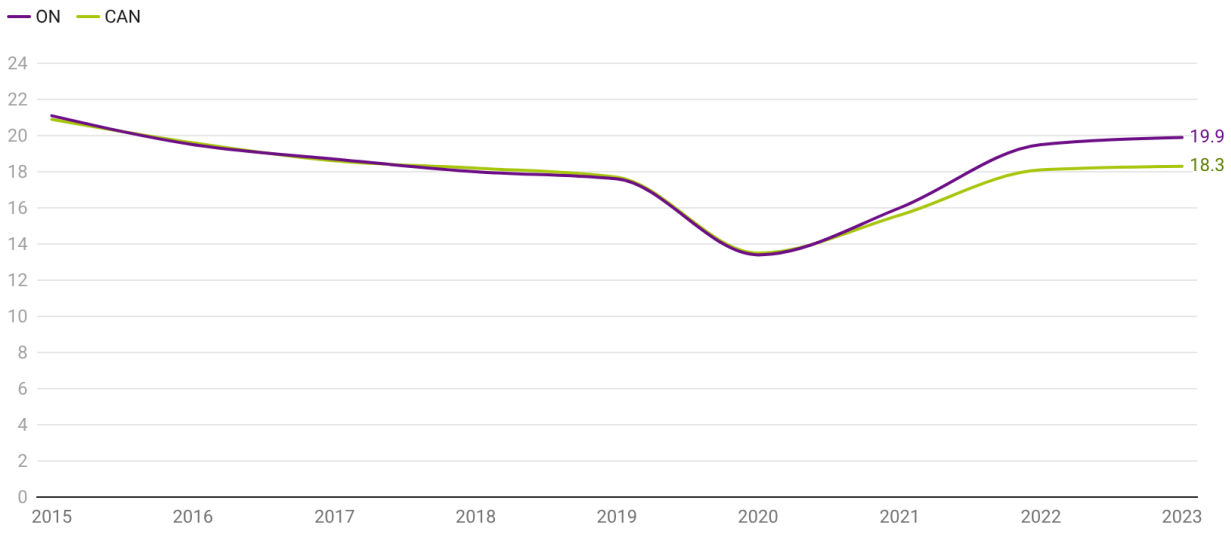
Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Figure 7. Percentage point change in child poverty rate, provinces and territories, under 18, 2022 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Figure 8. Percent of children in low income, Ontario and Canada, under 18, 2015 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Child poverty by Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)

A Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) is composed of one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a core population centre. To qualify as a CMA, the total population must be at least 100,000, with 50,000 or more residing in the core. [1]

Windsor had the highest child poverty rate among Ontario's 16 CMAs, with 23.7% of children living in poverty, or nearly one in four children. It was followed by St. Catharines–Niagara (22.1%), London (22%), and Toronto (21.7%). Guelph had the lowest child poverty rate at 13.9%, though this still represented nearly one in seven children.

Twelve of the sixteen CMAs saw increases in child poverty between 2022 and 2023, with Toronto experiencing the largest rise (+0.7 percentage points). Six CMAs had poverty rates above the provincial rate of 19.9%, one CMA (Belleville–Quinte West) matched the provincial rate, and nine CMAs fell below it.

The **2026 Toronto Child and Family Poverty Report Card, *Advancing the Promise for Toronto's Children***, found that Toronto had the highest poverty rate of all large urban centres in Canada with 25.7% of children living in the country's largest city.[ii]

Table 3. Child poverty rates by Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), Ontario, 2023

Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	Rate
Windsor	23.7
St. Catharines - Niagara	22.1
London	22.0
Toronto	21.7
Thunder Bay	21.4
Brantford	20.1
Belleville - Quinte West	19.9
Hamilton	18.3
Peterborough	18.1
Barrie	18.0
Greater Sudbury	17.4
Oshawa	17.3
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo	17.2
Kingston	16.6
Ottawa - Gatineau (Ontario)	16.1
Guelph	13.9

Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition, 2023. Web Table 11-10-0018-01 (formerly CANSIM Table 111-0046).*

Children under six had the highest rate of poverty by select age group

In 2023, 2.8 million people in Ontario lived in poverty, an increase of nearly 100,000 from the previous year. Children under six had the highest poverty rate among the age groups presented, at 20.6%. Families with young children may face heightened poverty because of unaffordable or unavailable child care, reduced employment income when caregivers, disproportionately women, leave or scale back paid work, and gaps in access to Employment Insurance. These barriers can be especially pronounced for Indigenous and racialized women and women with

[1] A census metropolitan area (CMA) is a broad functional region defined by commuting flows that binds an economic core with surrounding suburban and rural municipalities. In contrast, a large urban centre is strictly defined by physical infrastructure and population density, representing only the continuously built-up urban footprint of 100,000 or more residents.

disabilities, who may experience more precarious employment and therefore have greater difficulty accumulating sufficient insurable hours to qualify for EI.

Children under 18 years of age faced a slightly higher poverty rate than working-age adults (19.9% compared to 19.7%). However, the largest share of people living in poverty were adults aged 18 to 64, totalling nearly 1.9 million individuals, twice as many individuals as seniors and children combined.

Approximately 360,000 seniors lived in poverty (12.9%) in 2023 and were the only age group to experience a decline since 2022, but this rate still represents more than one in ten seniors living in poverty.

Table 4. Number and percent of individuals in low income by age group, Ontario, 2023

Age	All persons	Under 6	Under 18	18 to 64	Over 65
Percent	18.5	20.6	19.9	19.7	12.9
Number	2,799,330	174,740	565,440	1,874,800	359,090

***Source**: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition and Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.*

Children in lone parent families nearly four times more likely to live in poverty

Nearly half of children living in poverty were in couple families (48%), while 49% were in lone-parent families, most of which are led by women. A further 3% were tax filers under the age of 18 who did not live in a census family.

Children in lone parent families were nearly four times more likely to live in poverty than their counterparts in couple families (46.6% compared with 12.2%respectively). Their poverty was also significantly deeper, with average family incomes falling 41.4% below the Census Family Low Income, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) threshold.

Of concern are the tax filers who are under 18, but who do not live with a parent or grandparent. Almost all lived in poverty, with average incomes falling 74% below the CFLIM-AT threshold.

These findings expose profound gaps in Canada's income and social safety nets, particularly for children in women-led lone-parent families and young people living outside census families.

Nearly all Ontario children who lived without a parent or grandparent lived in poverty.

Table 5. Children in low income by family type, Ontario, 2023

Family type	Number of children in low income	Percent of children in low income	Average gap ratio
All families	565,440	19.9	37.9
Couple families	272,900	12.2	32.4
Lone parent families	277,470	46.6	41.4
Children not in census families	15,070	98.8	74

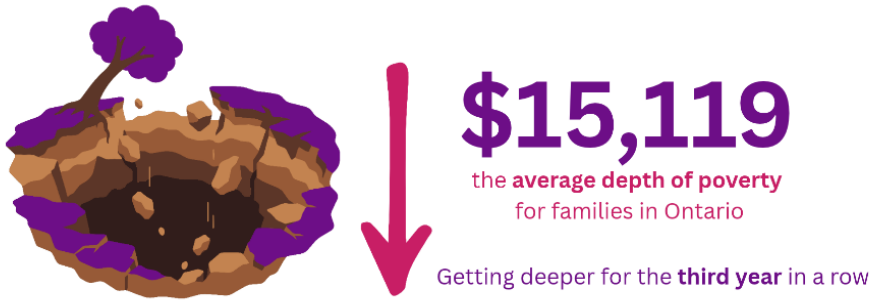
Source: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition.*

Low income families falling further behind

Depth of poverty is an important indicator that measures how far below the low income measure family incomes are falling. Campaign 2000's analysis calculates this "poverty gap" as the distance between the median of all low income and the CFLIM-AT threshold, by family type and expressed in a dollar amount.

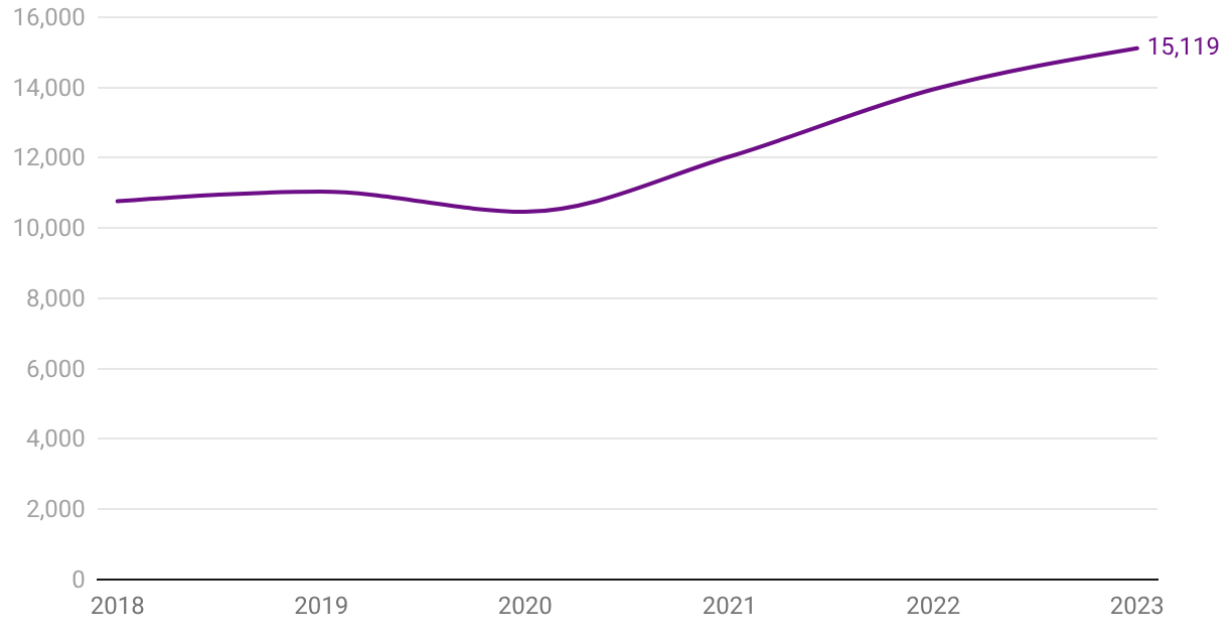
In 2023, 14.9% of families in Ontario lived in poverty (362,400 families). On average, their depth of poverty grew between 2020 and 2023. Families with low incomes needed $15,119 additional annual income to reach the low income threshold. This depth grew by $4,658 from 2020, when the average poverty gap was $10,461.

Lone-parent families with two children faced the deepest poverty. Their average poverty gap was $16,389, which was $1,434 wider than lone-parent families with one child ($14,955) and $1,705 wider than couple families with two children ($14,684). The minimum wage increased on October 1, 2023, from $15.50 per hour to $16.55. Even at the higher minimum wage, it would have taken a lone parent with two children an additional 990 hours of work to close the poverty gap, assuming no payroll deductions.



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File. Table: 11-10-0020-01 After-tax low income status of census families based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family composition.*

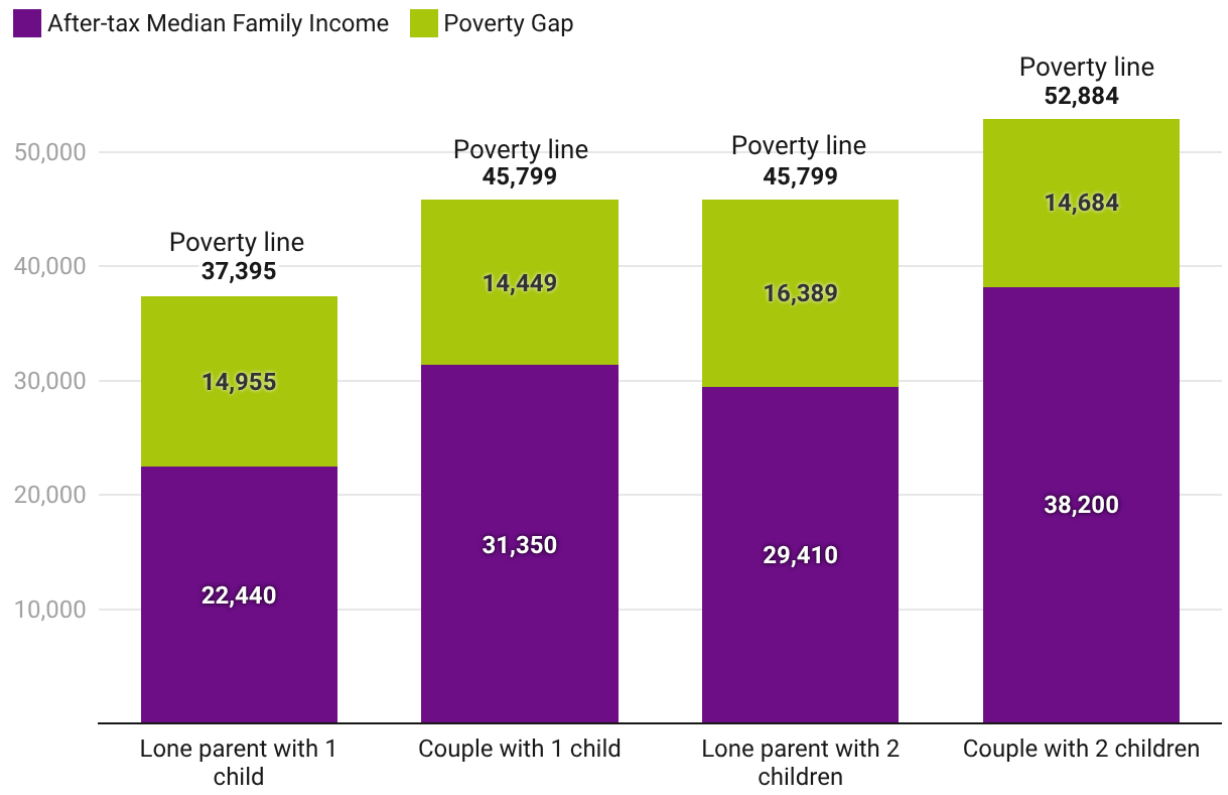
Figure 9. Average depth of poverty for all family types, Ontario, 2018 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File. Table: 11-10-0020-01 After-tax low income status of census families based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family composition.*



Figure 10. Depth of poverty by family type, Ontario, 2023



***Sources**: Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File. Table: 11-10-0020-01 After-tax low income status of census families based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family composition.; Statistics Canada. (2025) and Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors. T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2023.*

Children in lone parent families were nearly four times more likely to live in poverty than children in couple families.

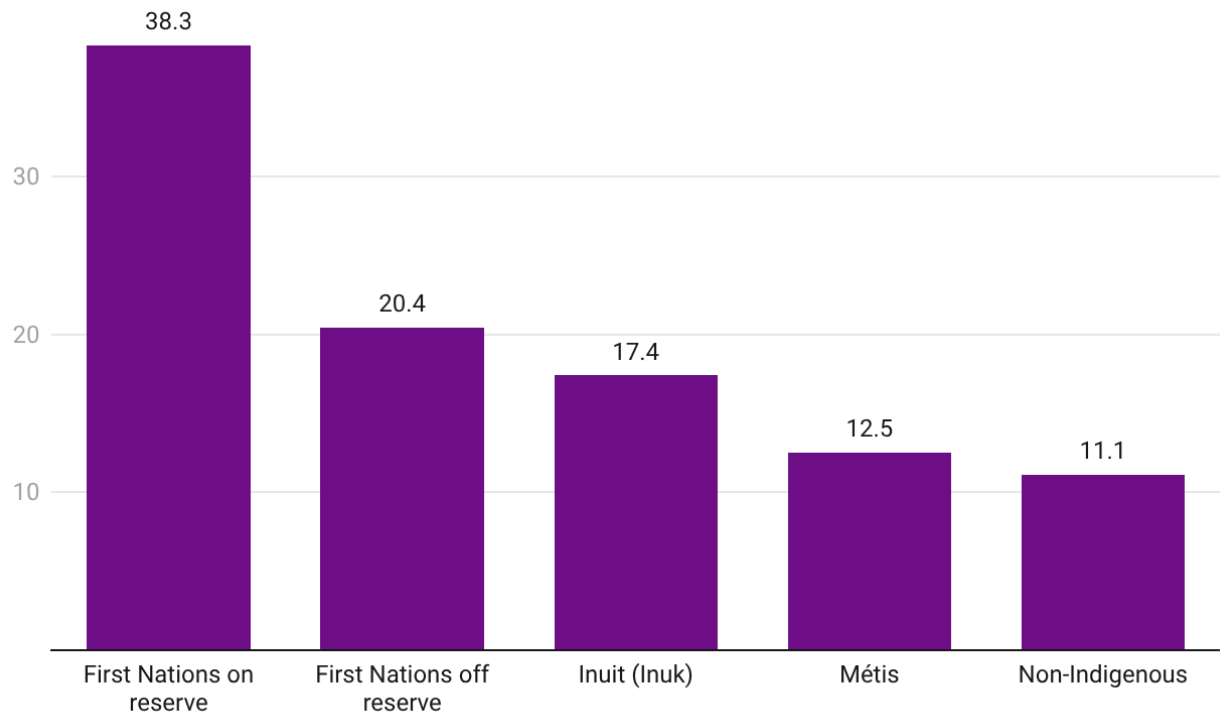


CHILD POVERTY IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Steep poverty rates among Indigenous children in Ontario reflect the ongoing effects of colonization through the violation of Treaty agreements and the systemic underfunding and neglect of critical on-reserve infrastructure, programs and services. Census 2021 data shows that for First Nation children on reserve, poverty rates in Ontario (38.3%) were higher than the national average (37.4%). According to more recent 2023 tax filer data, almost half of First Nation children living on reserves in Ontario were living in poverty (45.4%).

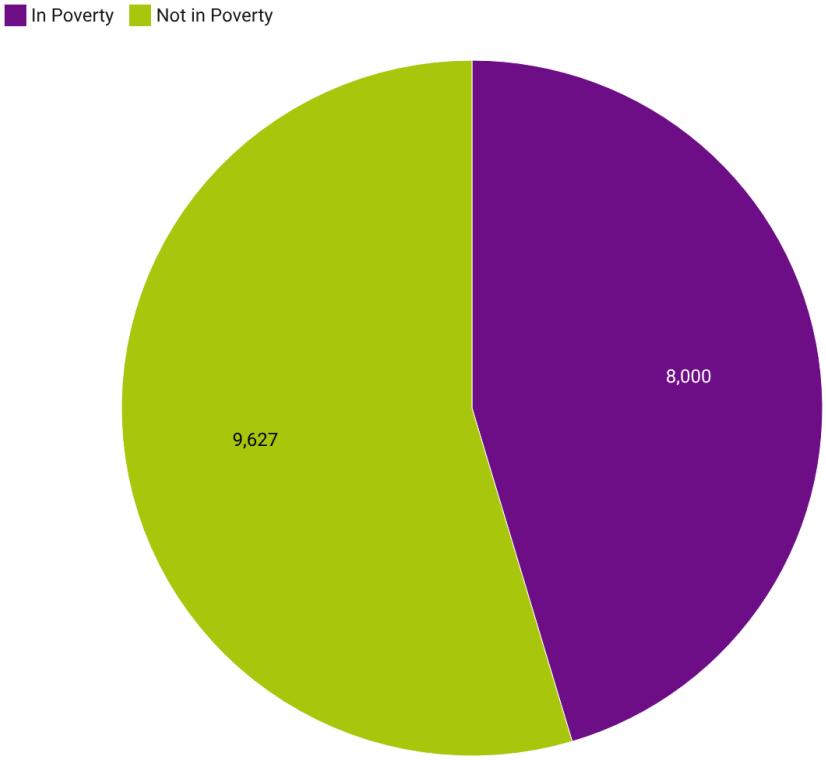
Census 2021 data reflects lower poverty rates than the national rate among Métis (12.5% versus 15.2% nationally), Inuit (17.4% versus 19.4% nationally) and First Nation children living off reserve (20.4% versus 24% nationally). Despite rates below the national averages, poverty still affected more than one in ten Métis children, more than one in six Inuit children and one in five First Nations children living off reserve in Ontario. Non-Indigenous children had the lowest child poverty rate (11.1%), yet more than one in ten lived in poverty.

Figure 11. Child poverty in First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities, Ontario, 2020

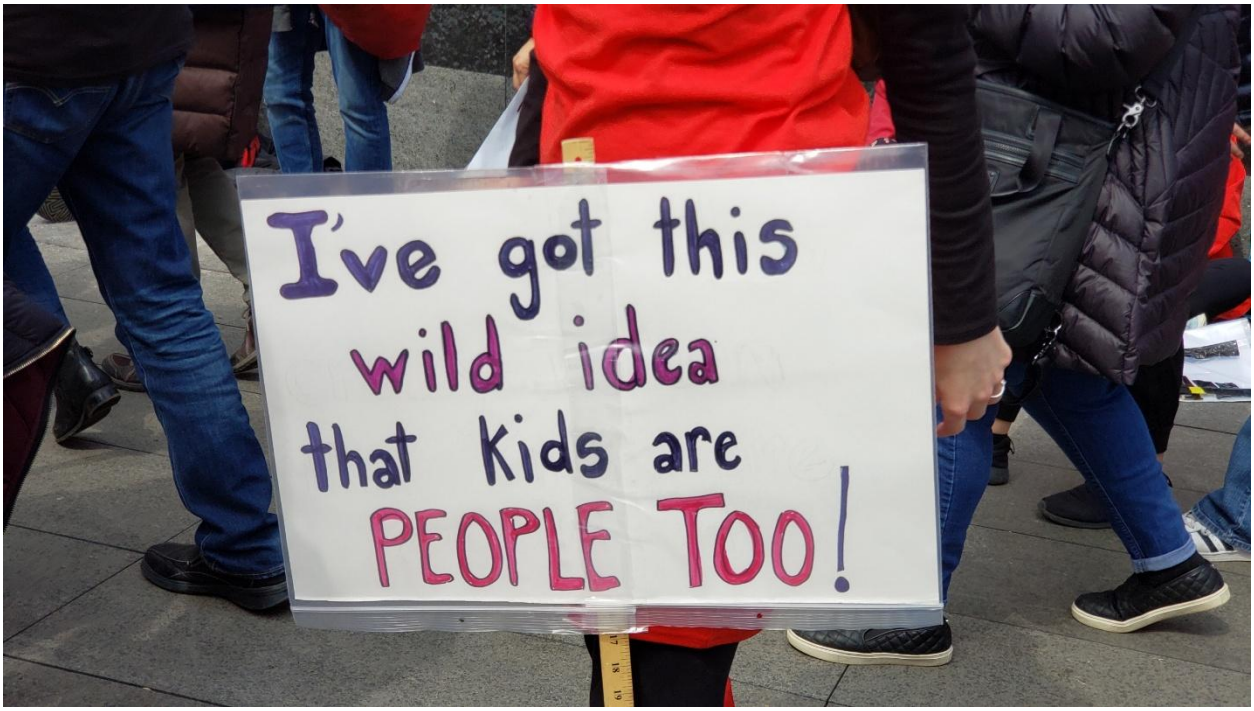


Source: *Statistics Canada. (2022.) Census 2021. Table 98-10-0283-01 Individual low-income status by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography.*

Figure 12. Number of First Nations children in low income on reserves, Ontario, 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File. Table I-13 - Individual data - After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants (census family low income measure, CFLIM-AT) for couple and lone parent families by family composition, 2023.*

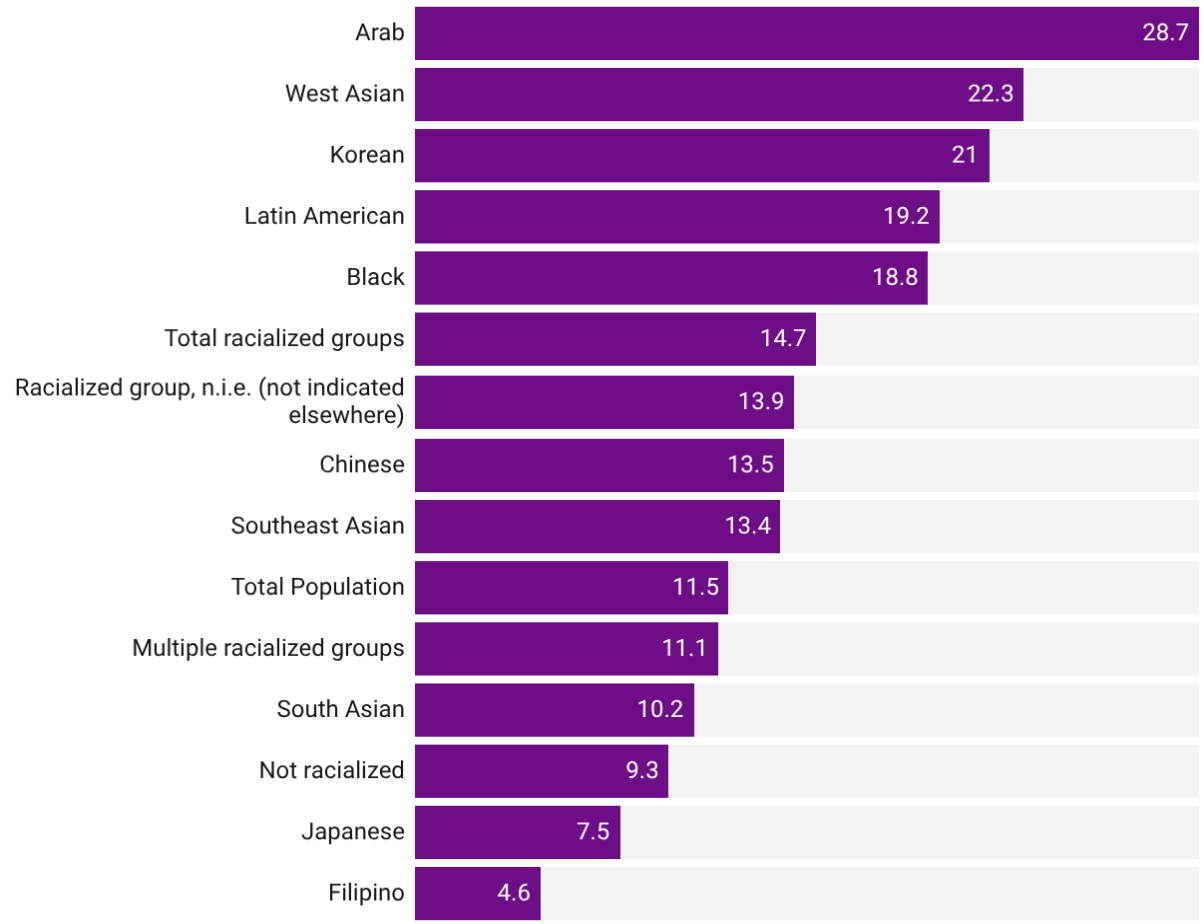


CHILD POVERTY IN RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES

Child poverty rates were unacceptably high across many racialized communities in Ontario in 2020. Census 2021 data found that Arab children faced the highest rate at 28.7%, 6.4 percentage points above West Asian children, the next-highest group at 22.3%. Their rate was also 2.5 times the overall rate of 11.5%.

The breadth of the disparity is equally concerning: West Asian, Korean, Latin American and Black children all experienced rates above the Ontario average. These outcomes point to structural barriers, including labour-market discrimination, precarious employment, inadequate income supports and unaffordable housing that disproportionately affect racialized families.

Figure 13. Child poverty rates, select racialized groups, Ontario, under 18, 2020

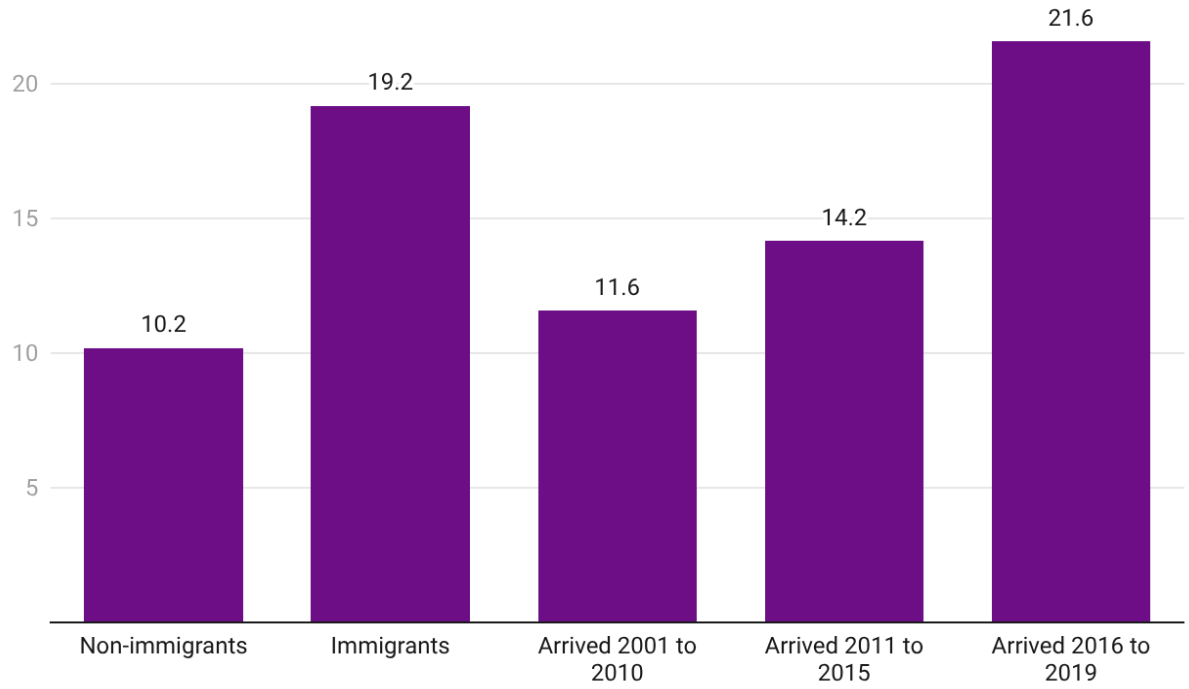


Source: *Statistics Canada. (2023). Census 2021, Custom Tabulation.*

CHILD POVERTY IN IMMIGRANT AND NEWCOMER COMMUNITIES

Nearly one in five immigrant children in Ontario lived in poverty in 2020. Census data found that at 19.2%, their poverty rate was 9 percentage points higher than the 10.2% rate among non-immigrant children. More recently arrived immigrant children who landed between 2016 and 2019 had a significantly higher poverty rate (21.6%) than those who arriving between 2011 to 2015 (14.2%) and those arriving between 2001 to 2010 (11.6%).

Figure 14. Child poverty by immigration period, Ontario, 2020



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2022.) Census 2021. Table 98-10-0314-01 Individual low-income status by immigrant status and period of immigration.*

Arab children faced the highest poverty rate at 28.7%, and the widest gap from the next highest racialized group out of any other group.

Immigrant children recently arrived in Ontario faced almost double the poverty rate of non-immigrant children.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The developmental service sector is a complex system that families must navigate to access essential services. Timely access in childhood is critical to positive outcomes. As Smythe et al. (2020) note, "Early identification of children with developmental disabilities… improves children's opportunities to maximize their developmental potential and functioning as well as their quality of life and social participation."[iii] In Ontario, resources exist to support children and youth with disabilities, but several barriers prevent families from accessing them quickly enough to support development and wellbeing.

Children with a developmental disability are eligible for provincial funding, including Special Services at Home (SSAH) and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD).[iv] Once a family is deemed eligible, their application is added to a waitlist, with wait times of up to five years. SSAH is a reimbursement program: families can access their allocated funding only by submitting receipts for eligible expenses.[v] This is a barrier for families who cannot afford upfront costs. ACSD provides financial support to low-income families, and household income must not exceed $76,920.[vi] Given the affordability crisis and the high cost of services, this income cap is a further barrier.

Many families with typically developing children have free access to natural supports and respite. Families of children with disabilities often cannot rely on natural supports because of their children's higher needs. They must depend instead on funded or fee-for-service respite. Over the past three years, funded respite services have declined while the cost of respite has risen.[vii]

CASE SCENARIO

Family Service Toronto, Children's Program

A single-parent family with two children was referred to the Ability Clinic at the Hospital for Sick Children for medical assessments. The clinic submitted a priority referral to the Coordinated Service Planning program, noting that the family had recently immigrated to Canada from Ghana and that the older child had recently been diagnosed with Down syndrome. The parent was the sole caregiver, and the family had no natural supports in Canada. The parent was unaware of available services and needed help accessing provincial funding: SSAH, for which the family was waitlisted, and ACSD.

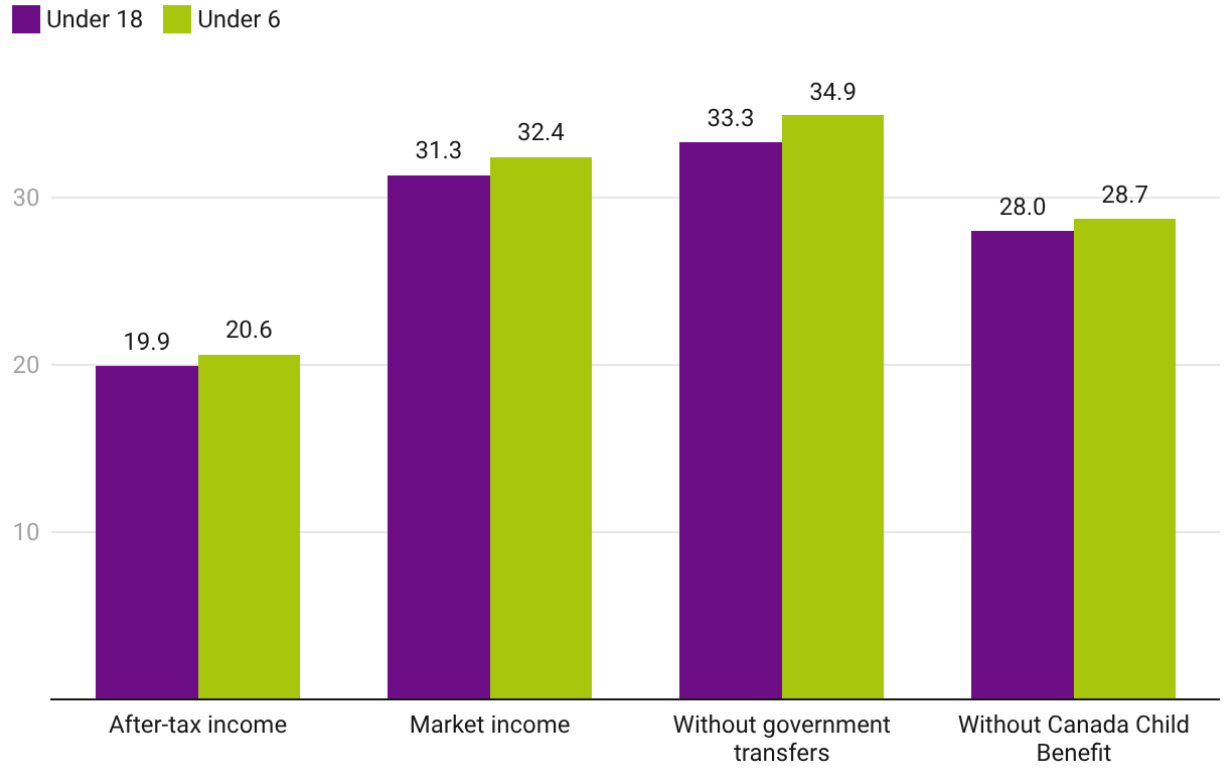
The parent worked long hours as a day labourer at minimum wage, with no extended benefits. He could not arrange or afford care for the children outside school hours. Because he had no paid leave, taking time off for his child's medical appointments meant lost wages and, eventually, termination. The family then fell behind on rent in their subsidized housing and faced potential eviction. Charitable funding covered some of the arrears and delayed eviction, but it was limited, and the family's debt continued to grow. The family was ultimately evicted and entered an emergency family shelter before moving into a shared living arrangement with an acquaintance.

GOVERNMENT TRANSFERS

Government transfers are a crucial component of poverty reduction plans. Nearly all income transfers to individuals and families come from federal and provincial governments. Without government transfers, Ontario's child poverty rate in 2023 would have been 33.3% for children under 18 years, 13.4 percentage points higher. For children under 6, the rate would have 34.9%, 14.3 percentage points higher.

The federal Canada Child Benefit (CCB) does much of the heavy lifting, accounting for more than half of the reduction in child poverty attributable to government transfers. In Ontario, the CCB alone reduced the child poverty rate for children under 18 and children under six by 8.1 each. Without the CCB, child poverty rates would have been 28% for children under 18 and 28.7% for children under six.

Figure 15. Child poverty rates with and without government transfers, Canada Child Benefit and by market income, Ontario, under 18 and under 6, 2023



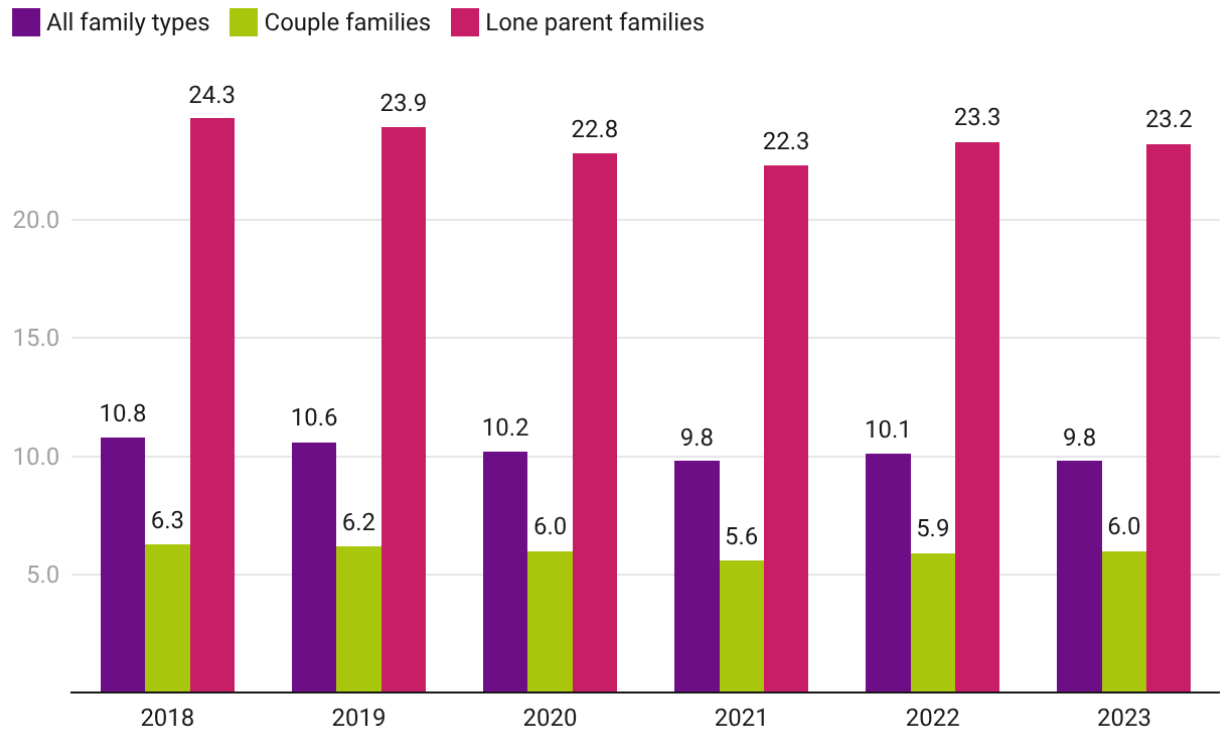
Sources: *Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0018-01 After-tax low income status of tax filers and dependants based on Census Family Low Income Measure (CFLIM-AT), by family type and family type composition and Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.*

Social assistance programs remain grossly inadequate for families. In 2025, total social assistance income was $35,353 for a couple with two children and $24,163 for a lone parent with one child.[viii] These incomes have been in decline since 2020.[ix] The most recent Maytree *Welfare in Canada* report found that total welfare amounts, which include social assistance, federal and provincial child benefits, tax credits and tax benefits, left both single parent families and couple families with two children in deep poverty. The depth of poverty for both family types is greater now than it was 24 years ago.[x]

Lone-parent families were also nearly four times more likely as couple families to receive social assistance. In 2023, 23.2% of lone-parent families received social assistance, compared with 6% of couple families.

Without government transfers, Ontario's child poverty rate in 2023 would have been 33.3% for children under 18 years, 13.4 percentage points higher than the reported rate.

Figure 16. Percent of families receiving social assistance, by family type, Ontario, 2018 to 2023



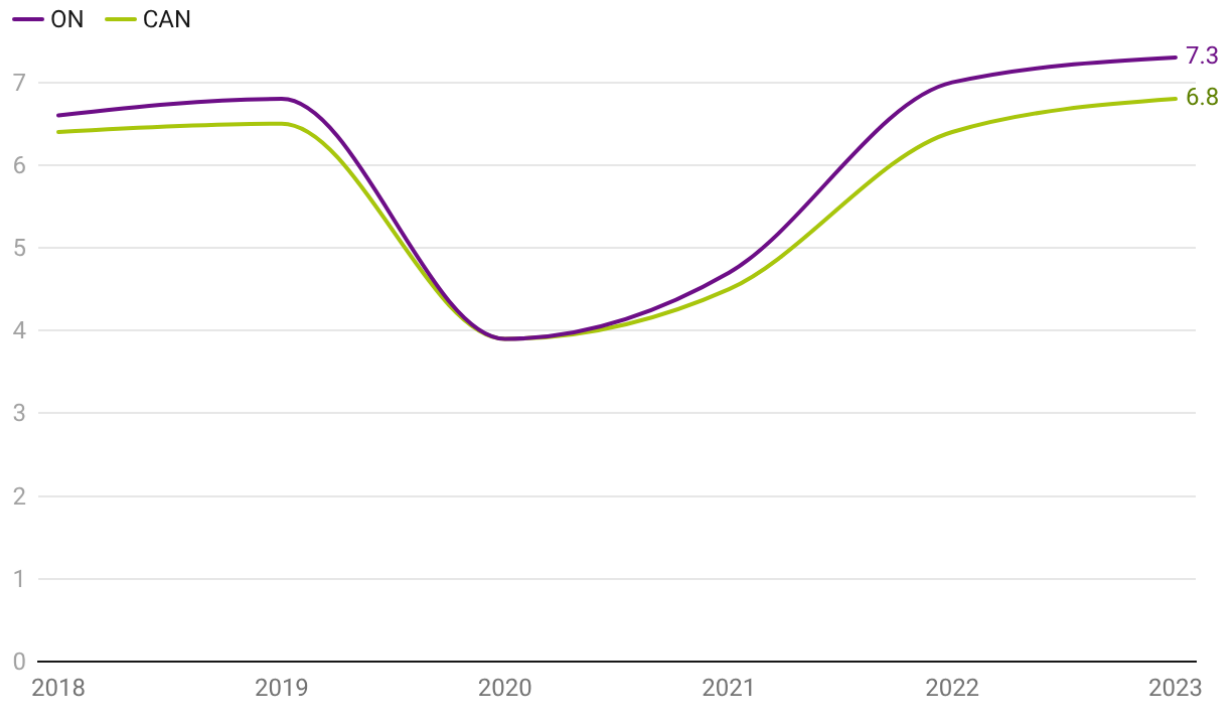
Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File. Table 11-10-0014-01 Sources of income by census family type.*

WORKING POVERTY

Transitioning recipients from social assistance and into employment was a central feature and primary target of the Ontario's 2020 to 2025 poverty reduction plan, *Building a Strong Foundation for Success: Reducing Poverty in Ontario*. In Ontario, child poverty rates by market income alone, which is primarily made up of employment and self-employment but includes income from investments, capital gains and other sources, the child poverty rates would have reached 31.3% for children under 18 and 32.4% for children under six (Figure 15).

Working poverty, defined as adults aged 18 to 64, excluding students, earning at least $3,000 annually, has been growing in Ontario. By 2023, the working poverty rate had nearly doubled from its 2020 low of 3.9% to 7.3%. It grew faster than the national rate over this period and rose above pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 17. Working poverty rate, Ontario and Canada, 2018 to 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). T1 Family File Reference 25055 - 1194245. Centre for Income and Socioeconomic Well-being Statistics. Custom tabulation.*

INCOME INEQUALITY

Top-decile families received 26.3% of after-tax income, compared with 1.2% for bottom-decile families. In dollar terms, the average after-tax income of the top 10% of Ontario families was $302,837, compared with $13,289 for the bottom 10%. The top 10% therefore had 22.8 times the income of the bottom 10%. Their share of income was also greater than that of the bottom 50% of families combined. Ontario's gap is wider than the national ratio of 19.2.

Lone parent families experienced particularly pronounced disparities, and lone mothers lost out the most. Average after-tax income in the lowest decile was just $3,604 for lone parent families, compared with $27,332 for couple families. The ratio of highest- to lowest-decile income was 37.1 among lone parent families, compared with 12.0 among couple families. Female lone parent families had lower average incomes than male lone parent families at each of the three reported deciles. Because most lone parent families are led by women, these gaps fall hardest on lone mothers and their children.

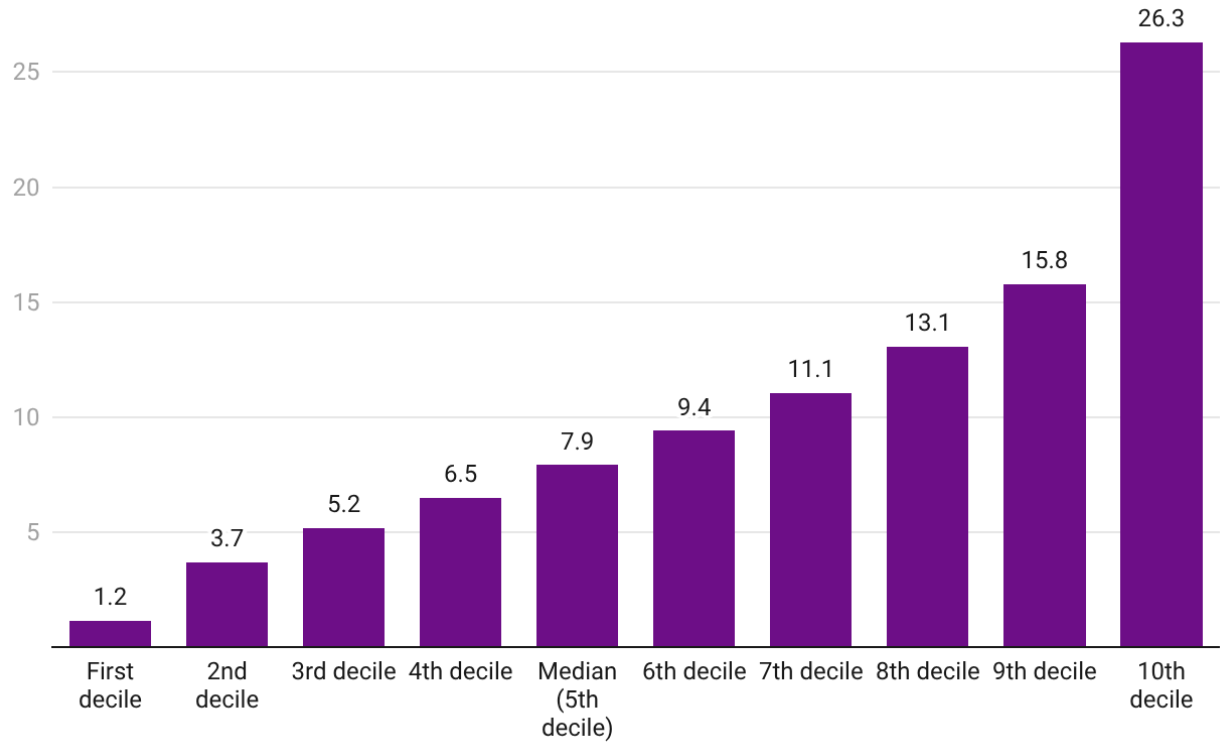
Female lone-parent families had the lowest average income of all family types and lowest average incomes across deciles.

Table 6. After-tax average income for families with children under 18, highest, median and lowest decile by family type, Ontario, 2023

Families with children under 18	First decile	Median (5th decile)	10th decile	Ratio of highest to lowest decile
All census families	13,289	91,112	302,837	23
Couple families	27,332	110,145	327,715	12
All lone-parent families	3,604	44,842	133,657	37
Male lone-parent families	4,562	50,841	166,550	37
Female lone-parent families	3,481	44,200	128,360	37

Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre of Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics, Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File), Custom Tabulation.*

Figure 18. Percent share of after-tax income by decile for all census families with children under 18, Ontario, 2023



Source: *Statistics Canada. (2025). Centre for Income and Socioeconomic Well-Being Statistics. Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individual (T1 Family File). Custom Tabulation.*



STRENGTHENING ONTARIO'S CHILD CARE SYSTEM

A universal child care system can provide high quality education and care experiences for young children and support parents financially and personally. To achieve both of these goals effectively, a child care system must meet three objectives: it must be affordable for families, it must provide enough quality child care so all children can participate, and it must offer decent work and pay to educators so programs can be staffed to ensure high quality.

Without access to child care options that meet their needs, families struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. Mothers may be forced to choose between earning an income (or preparing to earn an income by taking training or studying) or remaining out of the workforce to care for their children. Lack of access to child care limits mothers' income potential and contributes to poverty: research shows these effects continue over the life course.[xi]

In 2021, the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan committed to reduce child care fees to $10 a day by 2026, and to expand access to quality, licensed child care. The CWELCC plan is primarily federally funded but is implemented by each province and territory.

In Ontario, parent fees in licensed child care for children under six years were reduced in two phases: up to 25% in 2022, followed by a second reduction of up to 37% - a total of 52.75%, with fees subsequently capped at $22/day since 2025. However, the commitment to further reduce fees to $10/day has not been met despite a further injection of federal funds in October 2026. Ontario's new agreement with the federal government commits to maintaining the $22/day maximum fee only until June 30, 2027.



Ontario has maintained its fee subsidy system, which helps low income families with the cost of high child care fees. It has not been updated to align with CWELCC-reduced fee requirements. Parents with low income must demonstrate additional social criteria, for example, that they are working or studying, in order to be eligible for subsides, while higher income parents whose children may use CWELCC-funded child care do not have to demonstrate any additional requirements. A more equitable approach would be to accept all children without regard to their parents' activities, capping fees at $10/day with a geared-to-income sliding fee scale down to $0 for the lowest income.

For the CWELCC plan to be effective, many more families need to be able to access quality child care. But without a comprehensive child care workforce strategy, efforts to expand access will not succeed. The Ministry of Education projected that Ontario would face a shortage of 8,500 qualified ECE's needed to meet their initial expansion targets by 2025-2026.[xii] [2] To effectively address this shortage, a full workforce strategy must include a wage grid with decent wages, benefits and pension plans for early childhood educators and other child care workers.

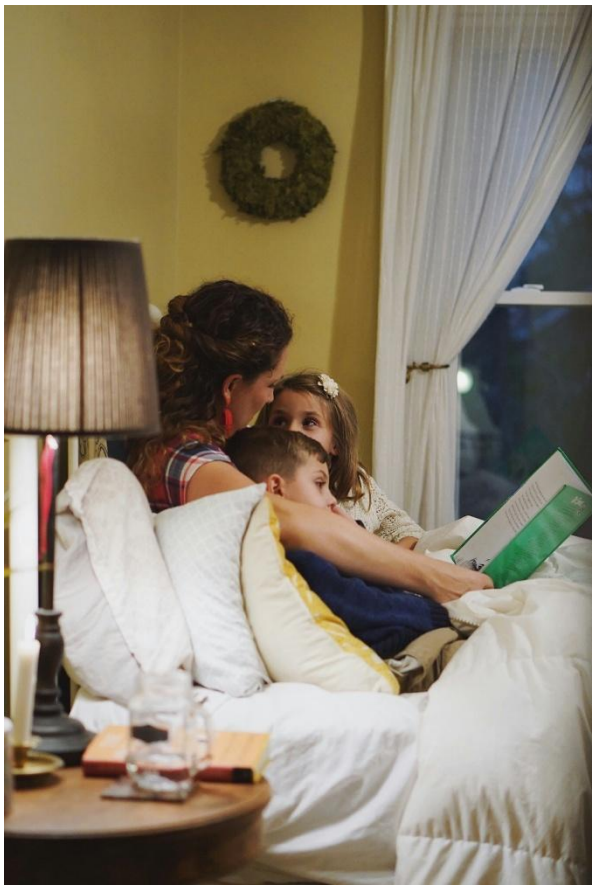
To move toward ensuring access for every family, Ontario needs an ambitious, publicly led plan to expand public and non-profit programs, building on the existing municipally operated child care programs and strengthening the non-profit sector's capacity to scale up. This strategy must identify and address existing local and province-wide barriers to public and non-profit expansion. It must prioritize expansion in underserved and low-income communities and be developed in consultation and collaboration with the child care community.[xiii] These elements, along with other recommendations provided in the *Roadmap to Universal Child Care in Ontario* (September 2025) developed by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, [xiv] are essential in creating a sustainable child care system.



[2] In the new October 26, 2026 ELCC agreement between Ontario and the federal government, the original unmet-target of 86,000 additional spaces became the new target to accompany the additional federal funding.

ADEQUATE HOUSING FOR ALL

Housing affordability continues to be a major driver of child and family poverty in Ontario. Rising rents, low vacancy rates, and a growing shortage of affordable housing leave many families struggling to meet their basic needs. These pressures are not experienced equally. Women-led lone-parent families, Indigenous families, racialized families, newcomers, families of children with disabilities and survivors of gender-based violence face disproportionate barriers to securing safe, suitable, and affordable housing, increasing their risk of housing insecurity, homelessness and poverty.



Housing outcomes are not only shaped income, but they are also affected by gender, race, disability, immigration status and family structure. Reducing child and family poverty requires more than increasing housing supply. Ontario must invest in affordable and supportive housing, strengthen rent-geared-to-income programs, improve tenant protections, and ensure that housing policies are designed to meet the needs of those facing the greatest barriers. Stable, affordable housing is a foundation for children's well-being, educational success and families' economic security.

CONCLUSION

Neglect has a price, and Ontario's children and families are paying it.

Those who face discrimination and systemic marginalization are paying the most. Child poverty has risen for three consecutive years and has deepened significantly. Meanwhile, inequality has widened as incomes grew for families at the top. While some investments have been made, they have been inadequate. As they struggle to thrive, children and families face a housing crisis and an affordability crisis at the same time with no relief in sight. These trends are the result of policy decisions and political neglect.

Solving these policy problems will require bold policy decisions.

Ontario can reverse these troubling trends by investing in housing, child care, income security and decent work. Attainable policy changes like increasing the minimum wage to a livable amount, immediately increasing the remuneration and earnings exemptions for social and disability assistance and introducing a sliding fee scale down to $0 for lower-income families accessing child care could provide immediate relief. Meaningfully combatting child poverty over the long term requires a coordinated, evidence-based, and targeted strategy that tracks results and shares data and learnings. The Ontario Campaign 2000 urges the province to release its updated poverty reduction plan without further delay.

Children and families in Ontario cannot afford to wait.



ENDNOTES

[i] Statistics Canada. (2025). Technical Reference Guide for the Annual Income Estimates for Census Families, Individuals and Seniors. *T1 Family File, Final Estimates, 2023*.
[ii] Queiser, S., & Wilson, B. (2026). *Advancing the Promise for Toronto's Children: Child and Family Poverty Report Card, Toronto 2026.* Toronto: Social Planning Toronto. ISBN:978-1-894199-69-8
[iii] Smythe, T., Zuurmond, M., Tann, C. J., Gladstone, M., & Kuper, H. (2021). Early intervention for children with developmental disabilities in low and middle-income countries - the case for action. *International health*, *13*(3), 222–231. https://doi.org/10.1093/inthealth/ihaa044
[iv] King's Printer for Ontario. (2026). *Family support and respite for children and youth with special needs*. ontario.ca. https://www.ontario.ca/page/family-support-and-respite-children-and-youth-special-needs
[v] Ibid.
[vi] Ibid.
[vii] Respiteservices.com. (2024). Respite Options. Retrieved from https://www.supportyourway.ca/York/respiteservices/respite-options/respite-options?optionId=100796
[viii] Laidley, J., & Oliveira, T. (2026). Ontario. In J. Laidley, & T. Oliveira, *Welfare in Canada, 2025* (p. 151-162). Toronto: Maytree. Retrieved from https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2025.pdf
[ix] Ibid.
[x] Ibid.
[xi] Baker, M., Gruber, J., & Milligan, K. S. (2026). *Investing in Mothers? The Long-Run Impact of a Universal Child Care Program on Maternal Work and Income.* National Bureau of Economic Research. doi:10.3386/w35514. Retrieved from: http://www.nber.org/papers/w35514
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[xiii] Ibid.
[xiv] Ibid.