



FAITH COMMUNITIES IN
ACTION AGAINST POVERTY

WE NEED TO INVEST IN PEOPLE, NOW MORE THAN EVER

Ontario Pre-Budget Submission
February 12, 2021

For the Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
Government of Ontario

From ISARC - Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
The Rev. Dr. Susan Eagle, Chair

*The **Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, ISARC**, represents Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faith communities across Ontario, including the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, the Anglican Provincial Synod of Ontario, the Ansaar Foundation, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the Canadian Unitarian Council, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto, Congregation Darchei Noam, Dicle Islamic Society, the Council of Imams, the Council of Canadian Hindus, the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Eastern Ontario District of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Holy Blossom Temple, the Islamic Humanitarian Service, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, North American Muslim Foundation, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Salvation Army, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Toronto Board of Rabbis, and the United Church of Canada.*



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The Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, **ISARC**, representing a broad interfaith coalition from across Ontario, welcomes this opportunity to have a voice in shaping the Ontario Budget for 2021.

For over thirty years, ISARC has participated in government hearings aimed at reducing poverty and offering an income security system that provides adequate supports and respects the dignity of people. ISARC has organized community hearings to gather stories from Ontarians living on low incomes that shape our recommendations for improvements.

Due to COVID-19, an increased proportion of the population is experiencing hardship. This has heightened the understanding and strengthened the commitment of the Ontario public to change the focus of financial investments so that we can survive the pandemic and build a more inclusive and participatory society.

ISARC proposes the following policy considerations:

SUPPORTING WORKERS STRUGGLING DUE TO COVID-19

- Ensure every Ontario worker has access to paid sick leave to avoid the choice between endangering coworkers and risking their livelihood;
- Ensure front-line workers have access to required personal protective equipment and pandemic pay that offsets the costs and risks associated with their roles;
- Provide oversight and a regulatory environment to ensure that workers have protection from unsafe conditions and the tools to address safety issues;
- Raise minimum wage to \$15 per hour, fast-tracking the increase to take effect in March 2021, due to the effects of COVID-19 on the Ontario workforce;
- Adjust current employment standards to protect workers adversely affected by COVID-19;
- Expand the range of workplace inspections to protect workers at essential businesses not complying with COVID-19 health and safety requirements; and
- Ensure funding to public-sector service providers to enable employers to pay a living wage.

IMPROVING LONG-TERM CARE

- Fast-track the proposed increase in daily care hours to the required four hours per resident to take place as soon as possible. This acceleration would help reduce the risk of further COVID -19 infection.
- We recommend that the increase of 15 minutes a day take effect no later than March 2021 (currently proposed for April 1, 2022).

PROVIDING MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Strengthen current partnerships with municipal and federal counterparts to expedite the development of purpose-built affordable housing.
- Create a realistic plan to preserve tenancies and prevent evictions now and after the eviction ban, while expanding rent bank programs;
- Develop new funding mechanisms, including rent supplement increases, to provide additional support services intentionally aligned with municipal and federal housing projects, to respond effectively to people experiencing chronic homelessness;
- Engage fully with the federal government to create more supportive housing. This is an integral part of front-line health care as it serves people with mental health and addictions issues in high-risk groups for COVID-19 transmission; and,
- Explore the repurposing of provincially-owned surplus property for the development of affordable and supportive housing.

INCOME SUPPORT FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

- Raise rates for OW to the level of CERB (\$500 per week). Raise ODSP rates to maintain the same proportional relationship to OW rates;
- Reverse newly-proposed eligibility restrictions for ODSP immediately to provide relief to people now left more vulnerable and marginalized due to COVID-19;
- Work with the federal government to develop a Basic Income program that would provide a livable income to the most vulnerable members of our communities.