

## Raising the incomes of the poorest Ontarians

As of November 2021, more than 843,000 Ontarians relied on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support program.

While the cost of income is going up dramatically, Ontario Works and ODSP rates have been frozen since 2018.

The maximum benefit for a single adult relying on Ontario Works is \$914 a month or \$10,963 a year, including all available tax credits. That leaves them below 50% of Ontario's poverty line – the Market Basket Measure (MBM).

The maximum benefit for a single adult relying on ODSP is \$1,350 a month or \$16,195 including all available tax credits. That leaves them below 75% of Ontario's poverty line -- despite having higher expenses due to their disabilities.

That means more than 843,000 Ontarians are living in deep poverty.

Average rent for a one-bedroom apartment ranges from just over \$1,000 in cities like St. Catharines or Hamilton to more than \$1,400 in Toronto.

Had OW and ODSP rates simply been adjusted for inflation since 2018, a single adult on OW would have \$700 more a year and a single adult on ODSP \$1,115 more a year.

### Questions

- What will your party do to increase the incomes of people who rely on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)?
- Will you index social assistance rates to the cost of living?
- What will you do to assure that everyone in Ontario has enough income to live above the poverty line?

## Affordable Housing and Homelessness

### Ontario is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis.

A report from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) -- Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario -- reveals the extent of the affordable housing crisis in Ontario and the very real challenges in the years ahead.

“Between 2011 and 2018, the number of households in core housing need grew from 616,900 to 735,000, an increase of 118,100 households, or 19.1 per cent.” (FAO, *Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario*, p. 2)

Core housing need means a household needs to spend more than 30% of their income for housing that is not in need of major repairs and that is appropriate to the size of the household.

The FAO also noted increases in homeless shelter use in the years prior to the pandemic. Given the increase in Ontario households in core housing need there is no surprise to see a high number of people experiencing homelessness in Ontario (FAO, p.29).

Despite federal and provincial funding commitments through the National Housing Strategy, the FAO forecasts that core housing need will continue to grow and that the province will miss its target to end chronic homelessness in Ontario by 2025. The FAO estimates that the total number of households in core housing need will increase to 815,500 households in 2027, an increase of 80,500 households from 2018. (FAO p. 3)

The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) notes: “Nearly 1 in 5 Indigenous households in Ontario experience core housing need and are 3x times more likely to experience poverty than the general population.” ONPHA has called for a dedicated Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Plan for Ontario.

The FAO concluded that it is unlikely that the Province will achieve its goal of ending chronic homelessness in Ontario by 2025 without new policy measures... (FAO p. 4) Current levels of support for housing and homelessness programs will still result in even more core housing need and homelessness.

Increasing new housing supply is only part of the answer. Existing housing needs to be kept affordable for those who depend on it. Many low-income tenants rent, and the vast majority of them are housed in the private rental market. Loopholes to rent-control measures such as the exemption for newly-built units and vacancy decontrol have failed to stimulate the creation of new affordable rental housing and instead have reduced the number of affordable rental units available.

## Questions

- What will your party do to substantially reduce the number of Ontario households experiencing core housing need?
- How will your party help keep rental housing affordable for low-income tenants?
- How will your party address housing needs of urban and rural indigenous people?
- What new measures would you implement to end chronic homelessness?



## Justice for Workers

Over the past four years, the minimum wage in Ontario has increased from \$14 to \$15 per hour, while the cost of living has increased by 9.84%. A 50-cent increase is scheduled for October 2022. However, this still leaves the minimum wage well below the living wage, which is estimated to range between \$16.20 in Sault Ste. Marie and \$22.08 in Toronto. In the meantime, corporate profits, CEO salaries and economic inequality have increased.

Many low-waged workers in Ontario also experience precarious working conditions, including uncertain work schedules, job insecurity, lack of paid sick days and other benefits, and lack of access to justice when treated unfairly, including unreasonable barriers to unionization which would give them the tools to improve their conditions. Precarious work has a harmful effect on the physical, mental, and emotional health of workers, and their families, with repercussions felt in the wider community. This was demonstrated during the pandemic, when lack of paid sick days led to many workplaces becoming hubs of COVID-19 transmission, threatening both public health and the ability of those businesses to operate.

Currently, Ontario employment legislation allows for different rates of pay and benefits between full-time workers and those who are part-time, temporary, or contract and agency workers. This provides an incentive to create precarious job positions. It can even create situations where workers earn less than minimum wage, because of what is taken off by the temp organization or subcontractor.

People employed in precarious work are predominantly those who are already vulnerable due to gender, racialization, immigration status (such as newcomers and migrant or undocumented workers) and disability. They are more likely to experience workplace harassment and have fewer avenues to assert their rights in the workplace. In particular, migrant workers and those who do not have permanent residency status are at risk of deportation if they speak up about dangerous working conditions or unjust treatment. Ensuring decent work is thus not just a matter of economic justice, but a matter of gender and racial justice as well. As well, it will improve the productivity and efficiency of the marketplace.

### Questions

- What will your party do to move the minimum wage towards a living wage for Ontario?
- What will your party do to ensure all workers in Ontario have access to paid sick days?
- What will your party do to ensure pay equity for workers, regardless of gender, racialization, immigration status or status as part-time, agency, app, contract or temporary workers?
- How will your party ensure all workers are able to assert their rights as workers?

## Long Term Care

According to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) and the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC), there are currently 627 LTC homes in Ontario that house over 85,000 residents. Between 2011 and 2018, the population of Ontarians aged 75 and over grew by 20 per cent. There are more than 38,000 people languishing on wait lists for long-term care.

Currently the Ford government is mid-stream in allocation >18,000 new & rebuilt beds to for-profit companies, including the very worst chains responsible for thousands of deaths among their residents in the pandemic from COVID and neglect.

Evidence demonstrates that for profit providers of care provide lower quality and amounts of care. Yet the government is assigning many/most new 30 year licenses to for profit operators, some/many of whom have poor records. Moreover, for-profit operators are exempt from the law requiring disclosure of compensation paid to staff and officers which amount to \$100,000 or more annually.

More than 4,500 long-term care residents in Ontario died of COVID-19, many preventably. Thousands of others died of dehydration, malnutrition and lack of care. Not one LTC home operator has been held accountable: not a single one has been fined, not one has lost their license to operate a LTC home.

Current staffing levels in long-term care homes are catastrophically low, so low as to amount to systemic negligence. It is impossible to treat residents with respect and dignity and to provide bathing, foot care, feeding, human company, medications, hydration, oral care even at the most basic level, in mere minutes per day. Each resident needs a minimum of four hours' care per day, not an "average" amount of four hours' care per day. It certainly must not be an average of care across all homes that is thus not enforceable on any single home.

Long-term care residents have suffered more than almost any other group in our province during the pandemic. The pandemic has exposed the way human rights of long-term care residents are routinely violated. Residents have been put in isolation for months, without recourse or appeal. Families have been locked out. Residents have been denied access to hospital care even when it meant their death. Hospital patients have been offloaded into long-term care homes, overriding their right to consent.

### Questions

- How will your party ensure that each resident gets a minimum of four hours of care per day from their hands-on PSWs, and nurses? When will you have this in place for each and every home?
- How will your party ensure that there is transparency in long term care oversight so that there is accountability for public dollars spent in for-profit as well as not-for-profit long term care homes?
- How will your party ensure that licensing of long-term care homes is tied to quality of care service?
- How will your party ensure that standards of care are strictly enforced in each and every long-term care home? What kind of inspection will you provide? Will you reinstate comprehensive inspections cancelled by the present government?
- How will your party provide proper staffing through recruitment, training, payment and retention of Long Term Care employees?
- Will you require each home to report at least quarterly on the actual hours of front line care received by residents as well as on the hours devoted to housekeeping and laundry services which are crucial for minimizing the spreading of infections?