

Pre-Budget 2023 Consultation Talking Points



Ontario Federation of Labour Submission

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UNIVERSAL, ACCESSIBLE, AND WELL-FUNDED PUBLIC SERVICES

THE FORD REALITY:

Ontario's program spending per person has consistently ranked at or near the lowest among the provinces since 2008.

We won't let our public services be sold off for profit nor will we allow them to be shortchanged.

The reality is that the government has enough money to cover the shortfalls in public services — it just needs to act.

Instead, the Ford government is starving these systems of the funding they need, waiting for them to crumble, and then championing privatization as the only solution.

Privatization is the theft of the public good for private profit.

OUR DEMANDS:

We need universal, accessible, and well-funded public services. That means:

- Ensuring that big corporations and the rich pay their fair share of taxes, including taxes that remain unpaid, undeclared, or hidden revenue
- Establishing, investing in, and improving access to publicly delivered universal services and programs — such as health care, mental health care, pharma care, dental care, eye and vision care, child care, long-term care, housing, elementary and secondary education, post-secondary education, social and community services, and public pensions — for all residents of Ontario
- Providing public services in an inclusive and equitable manner and centering equity concerns in the design, delivery, and expansion of services
- Stopping the privatization of our public services and assets, including Crown corporations, as well as our health care, education, child care, infrastructure systems, and any other service or program
- Guaranteeing professional-level wages for all public sector workers

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Health Care

THE FORD REALITY:

Ontario public hospitals have been stretched beyond the breaking point.

- In 2023, emergency departments across Ontario were forced to close 158 times, resulting in the equivalent of 184 days where local urgent care needs were left unmet.
- For those emergency rooms that manage to keep their doors open, significantly high wait times have seen Ontarians leave before they receive any care or line the hallways for hours or even days before they move to the appropriate in-patient care area.
- Paramedics are reporting Code Zero events as all available ambulances are busy and unavailable for emergency calls.
- Pediatric ICUs in Ontario are forced to operate above capacity, jeopardizing treatment outcomes for sick children.
- Nearly 12,000 children are on a waitlist for surgeries across Ontario – about half of which are waiting beyond recommended wait times.
- Almost half of the patients on Ontario’s surgical waitlist were forced to delay longer than doctors would recommend — a 123 per cent increase compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- An estimated 11,000 Ontarians have died waiting for surgeries and scans in the past year.

Instead of resourcing and supporting local public hospitals and stopping the price gouging of private for-profit staffing agencies, the Ford government is funnelling monies and resources to private for-profit clinics and hospitals.

- In 2023, the fastest growing area of health care spending was private, for-profit delivery as independent health facility spending went up by 106 per cent in one year.
- In 2022, Ford quietly increased funding by 60 per cent to private hospitals run by his donors – compared to the funding they received every year between 2011 and 2019.

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- With the passage of Bill 60, the Ford government has permanently moved OHIP-funded procedures out of public hospitals and into private independent health facilities – 97 per cent of which are for-profit facilities.

OUR DEMANDS:

- Increasing annual hospital funding to protect and expand service levels and rebuild capacity, including a greater availability of beds in regular care and intensive care units
- Ending staff shortages among front-line workers in health care and long-term care and developing a long-term strategy to train, recruit, and retain front-line workers
- Ensuring that all work in health care and long-term care is decent work, with full-time employment, job security, and access to paid sick days, benefits, pensions, and a livable wage
- Declaring the opioid crisis a public health emergency
- Ensuring universal access to mental health, addiction, treatment consumption, and overdose prevention services and infrastructure as well as investing in harm reduction strategies
- Strengthening the Canada Health Act by requiring that federal health transfers and provincial access to new public health care investments be contingent on those funds being invested in public healthcare and not used to fund for-profit delivery through private facilities or services
- Enforcing the ban on user fees and extra billing of patients
- Amending the Canada Health Act to include mental health care in addition to physical care
- Restoring and applying additional appropriate funding and supports that ensure essential gender affirming trans health care and social services are available across Ontario

Education

THE FORD REALITY:

Ontario has a world-renowned publicly funded public education system. Instead of investing in our kids when they need it most, the Ford government continues to cut funding to public schools.

- In 2023, there's \$1,200 less in funding for every child.
- That means fewer educators and support staff in schools; more crowded classrooms and less one-on-one time; missing supports for children who need them; and delayed school repairs, forcing school boards to sell buildings to make up for funding gaps.

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- In 2023, government documents showed that most of the children in Ontario waiting for publicly funded core autism therapy will not receive it any time soon.
- Current funding will only serve about 20,000 children in core clinical therapies. Meanwhile, there are about 60,000 children languishing on the waitlist and about 7,000 more are added to the list each year.
- This continued underfunding and underspending in the education sector will jeopardize student outcomes and negatively impact Ontario's future.

The Ford government is paving a pathway towards privatization with our education system.

- As part of their "Plan to Catch Up", the government provided millions of dollars in direct payments to parents "to help their kids catch up".
- Not only is the amount per child – up to \$250 to pay for tutoring, supplies, or equipment – vastly insufficient to improve learning outcomes, but there are also no strings attached to the money.
- On an individual basis, these direct payments are exacerbating inequities between students. Collectively, these public funds can be spent towards lowering class sizes and increasing in-school supports, where all students can benefit from improved conditions within the classroom on an ongoing basis.
- In late 2023, Ontario's ombudsman launched a systemic investigation into the Ministry of Education's direct payments (e.g., Support for Parents, the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit, and Catch-Up Payments) to parents – because of concerns about a lack of fairness and transparency.

OUR DEMANDS:

- Providing enhanced and sufficient ventilation, including government-mandated and funded assessments and upgrades, for primary and secondary schools and all essential public institutions
- Reducing class sizes, while maintaining adequate levels of staffing and educational support in schools
- Increasing supports for students with special education needs in primary and secondary schools
- Launching an anti-hate strategy that works to protect students and staff in public schools and spaces from open hate and further encourages education on compassion, belonging, and respect
- Updating the Ontario curriculum to include Canadian Black history in Ontario's K-12 curriculum

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Child Care

THE FORD REALITY:

Within months of committing to making child care more affordable, the Ford government made concessions to for-profit daycares.

- The province stripped a series of checks and balances from Ontario’s funding rules for daycares that join the national program – including a restriction on “undue profits” and the removal of “ineligible expenditures,” which would have prevented operators from using public money to finance their mortgages or pay executive bonuses.
- Furthermore, since the rollout of nation-wide early learning and child care agreements in 2022, the pressures on the child care sector have increased dramatically.
- Families are being promised \$10 per day child care, but that promise will remain broken if they cannot access a space – and that requires more staffing.
- An additional dollar per hour for early childhood educators (ECE)s is woefully inadequate.
- Without sufficient investment in workers and physical spaces, increases in demand will far outpace increases in supply.
- By 2026, around 227,000 children could be left without spaces based on the Ford government’s current plans.

OUR DEMANDS:

- Creating non-profit, affordable, and accessible child care spaces as well as ending the licensing of new for-profit child care centres
- Removing barriers to child care subsidies for low-income families
- Instituting a proper salary scale starting at \$30 per hour for registered ECEs and \$25 per hour for non-registered ECEs

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Social Assistance

THE FORD REALITY:

As the cost-of-living skyrockets, Ontarians who were already among the poorest and most vulnerable prior to the global pandemic are now worse off than they were before.

- Since 2008, both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario's Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates have been below the deep poverty line, leaving at nearly 900,000 Ontarians behind.
- In 2023, ODSP rates increased a paltry 6.5 per cent in 2023 – a negligible additional \$80 per month per recipient.
- OW recipients have had their rates fixed at \$733 per month for five years.
- This means that they must survive on just 37 per cent of the funds required for them to have a roof over their heads, food on the table, and enough money to maintain a very basic standard of living. In other words, these recipients would need another \$17,000 a year just to reach the poverty line.
- Ontario's broken social assistance system has left almost all recipients at risk of being unhoused, in poor health, and in deep hunger.
- For women, racialized people, new immigrants, Indigenous persons, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and people requiring accommodations, their reality is much starker.

OUR DEMANDS:

- Doubling social assistance rates and Ontario Disability Support Payment (ODSP) to sit well above the poverty line
- Implementing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that ensures food and housing security, access to education and job training, employment opportunities, and other supports
- Expanding access to social assistance for all persons regardless of their immigration status and providing supports with dignity, care, and respect

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Public Housing

There is an alarming housing affordability crisis across Ontario.

- The number of Ontario households in core housing need – living in an unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable dwelling and not able to afford alternative housing in their community – has increased.
- At the same time, the number of households receiving housing support from provincial programs has decreased.
- Together, these two troubling trends have led to a significant rise in the waitlist for social housing – with many households waiting over ten years.
- Meanwhile, the Ford government has acknowledged that they will fall well short of their signature commitment to build 1.5 million homes by 2031.
- In 2022, the net out-migration from Ontario was at its highest level this *century*, as unaffordable housing prices and rents continue to force people to leave their communities.
- The present crisis has been driven by the financialization of housing, and public housing offers the straightest line to removing investment speculation from the housing market.
- Housing is being treated as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than as a human right.
- That's why we're seeing the skyrocketing cost of housing; the increasing inaccessibility of home ownership; the mounting pressure to move to other cities to find housing; a system that massively favours and rewards private landlords and developers; the precarity of renters and tenants; rising personal evictions; the homelessness crisis; and the emergence of tent cities in parks.

OUR DEMANDS:

- Creating a comprehensive provincial social housing program that treats housing as a public utility
- Legislating rent rollbacks and controls for all renters in Ontario
- Implementing a comprehensive housing strategy that provides housing for unhoused people – without policing them – and secures housing for people in precarious accommodations – without threatening the environment
- Passing real rent control and a Tenants' Bill of Rights, capping mortgage payments as inflation rates rise, as well as stopping evictions and foreclosure