



**ONTARIO  
FEDERATION OF  
LABOUR**

# 2026 PREBUDGET SUBMISSION

**Standing Committee on Finance  
and Economic Affairs**

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Austerity is a choice – not an economic necessity.

Ontario has the capacity to invest in people and public services, but the Ford government has chosen tax cuts and privatization instead.

After eight years in power, this government owns the results of its fiscal and policy decisions – and this is where Ontario now stands.

The 2025 budget made the gas tax cut permanent, reducing provincial revenues by \$1.8 billion every year. It also eliminated tolls on Highway 407 East, costing another \$94 million annually.<sup>i</sup> These are not temporary measures. They are permanent withdrawals from the public revenue base.

At the same time, Ontario's program spending is shrinking relative to the size of the province. In 2018-19, when the Ford government took office, Ontario spent \$12,795 per person (in 2025 dollars) on public programs. By 2027-28, per-capita program spending is projected to fall to \$12,570 – a decline of 1.8 per cent. That small percentage translates into a real cut of more than \$3.7 billion when population growth is factored in.<sup>ii</sup>

Ontario now has the second-lowest own-source revenue as a share of GDP in Canada, meaning every province except Alberta reinvests a larger share of its economic capacity into public services, infrastructure, and people. On a per-capita basis, Ontario raises \$2,400 less per person than British Columbia and \$4,100 less than Quebec every year. This revenue gap is one of the main reasons Ontario spends far less on health care, education, housing, and social services than other provinces.<sup>iii</sup>

Since 2018, tax cuts have shifted the burden of funding government services away from corporations and onto households. In 2018, personal income tax and the sales tax made up 47 per cent of Ontario's revenues. By 2024, they had risen to 53 per cent. Over the same period, corporate income tax rose only one percentage point, from 12 to 13 per cent.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite the rhetoric around "tax relief," Ontario households are now carrying a larger share of the cost of government, while corporations contribute little more than they did before.

This is the context for everything that follows.

Ontario's shortages in hospitals, child care, schools, housing, social assistance as well as colleges and universities are not accidents. They are the predictable result of a government that has chosen lower taxes over public investment – and then asks families, workers, and municipalities to absorb the damage.

**Ontario's working people demand:**

- 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
- 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

## POWER IN WORKPLACES

### Decent Working Conditions

A government serious about strengthening Ontario's economy must be serious about rebalancing power in workplaces and communities. The test is straightforward: does this budget increase workers' power, security, and share of the wealth they create?

For the majority of Ontario's workforce employed in the private sector – including manufacturing, food processing, logistics, construction, retail, and hospitality – that test is currently being failed. Barriers to unionization, weak employment standards enforcement, and inadequate health and safety protections continue to suppress wages and expose workers to preventable harm. These risks are compounded by widespread subcontracting, misclassification, and the growing use of temporary and agency labour, which allow employers to offload responsibility while workers absorb the cost.

Strengthening decent work in Ontario requires addressing these realities directly. A budget that claims to support working people must improve access to collective bargaining, enforce employment standards and health and safety laws across all sectors, and ensure that public investments in private industry come with enforceable accountability for how workers are treated.

That work begins by making it easier for workers to join a union and bargain collectively. Strong labour laws are not a barrier to growth – they are the foundation of fair wages, safe workplaces, and a real voice on the job. When workers can organize, wages rise, turnover falls, and workplaces – public and private alike – become more stable and productive.

Instead, the Ford government has spent the last eight years doing the opposite.

Bill 124, passed in 2019, imposed a 1 per cent cap on wage increases for public sector workers even as inflation surged. It was found unconstitutional twice for violating workers' right to free and fair collective bargaining. It drove down wages, pushed workers into poverty, and destabilized essential public and community services.

Two years after Bill 124 was repealed, more than 50,000 community and social services workers are still waiting to be made whole. These workers support people with disabilities, seniors, survivors of violence, and families in crisis – yet many are struggling to afford rent and food themselves.

The government has paid some workers and left others behind, choosing winners and losers instead of delivering full justice. That choice continues to undermine recruitment, retention, and service stability across the sector.

A province that suppresses wages and weakens collective bargaining cannot sustain the workforce that delivers public services. The same model that stripped workers of their rights under Bill 124 is now producing shortages, burnout, and service gaps across Ontario.

The same disregard for workers' rights is now being repeated through the government's forced return-to-office directive.

The Ford government ordered Ontario public service workers back to in-person work up to four days per week, with a move toward full-time office work, without transparency, evidence, or negotiation with unions. This decision ignores the documented benefits of hybrid and remote work – including lower emissions, higher productivity, improved retention, and expanded access for women, racialized workers, and people with caregiving responsibilities.

Remote and hybrid work broadened access to good public sector jobs that were previously out of reach for many. Rolling it back unilaterally is not about improving services – it is about reasserting control over workers' lives and working conditions.

Whether through wage suppression or workplace directives, the pattern is the same: decisions are imposed, not negotiated – and workers are expected to absorb the cost.

A province that weakens collective bargaining, restricts organizing, and overrides working conditions cannot build the stable, skilled workforce that strong public services depend on.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- A 6.5 per cent retroactive catch-up increase applied to wage grids for all workers impacted by Bill 124
- Full provincial funding to cover Bill 124 remedies, so agencies can pay workers without cutting jobs or services
- Adequate, long-term funding increases for community and social service workers to prevent layoffs, stabilize programs, and strengthen critical services across the province
- Labour law reforms that strengthen workers' collective power, including card-based certification for all organizing campaigns, a ban on replacement workers during strikes, an unrestricted right to strike, strong protections against employer interference, and access to the Labour Relations Act for all workers – including agricultural workers
- Equal and enforceable rights for all workers, regardless of immigration or employment status, including strengthened employment standards, health and safety protections, and workers' compensation coverage
- The reversal of the government's forced return-to-office mandate and meaningful bargaining with affected unions
- The reinstatement and protection of remote and hybrid work arrangements where they improve service quality, equity, and worker well-being
- A firm commitment to free, fair, and meaningful collective bargaining across the public and broader public sectors

### **Accountability**

Public investment plays a critical role in supporting economic activity across Ontario's private sector. However, too often, public funds flow to private corporations without enforceable conditions to protect workers, communities, or the public interest.

When governments invest in private-sector development – through subsidies, tax credits, or infrastructure support – those investments must be tied to clear, enforceable accountability measures. Public dollars should be used to create good jobs, strengthen local economies, and improve working conditions, not to finance executive compensation, shareholder dividends, or corporate restructuring that leaves workers worse off.

The experience of Algoma Steel underscores why public investments in private industry must come with enforceable accountability. Despite receiving \$500 million in federal and provincial loan assistance, including \$100 million from Ontario, the company has announced approximately 1,000 layoffs, highlighting the need to ensure public funds are tied to job protection, worker transition plans, and clear limits on private extraction.<sup>v</sup>

Ontario has seen the consequences of unconditional corporate subsidies, where companies receive public support and then suppress wages, contract out work, or shed jobs. This undermines workers' power, weakens local communities, and erodes public trust.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- A fair and sustainable economic strategy that requires public investment in the private sector be conditional on respect for labour rights, strong health and safety protections, equitable wages, and reinvestment in the workforce

## Health and Safety

Worker health and safety protections must reflect the realities of today's workplaces. Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) has not kept pace with growing workforce size, climate-driven hazards, or the well-documented risks of psychological injury at work. As a result, workers are being exposed to preventable harm while enforcement and prevention lag.

Under the current OHSA, workplaces with 50 or more employees are required to establish a Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) with at least one certified worker representative and one certified management representative. However, the legislation does not scale certification requirements with workforce size. Whether a workplace employs 50 workers or 1,500, the requirement remains the same.

This one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate. In large and complex workplaces, a single certified worker representative cannot reasonably identify hazards, conduct inspections, participate in investigations, and meaningfully represent workers' health and safety concerns. Insufficient representation weakens prevention and increases the risk of injury, illness, and death.

Climate change is further intensifying workplace hazards. Extreme heat now poses a serious and growing threat to workers across sectors including education, postal services, health care, municipal services, construction, and migrant farm work. Heat stress can injure, sicken, and kill workers – yet Ontario lacks clear, enforceable protections.

The burden of heat exposure is not evenly distributed. Indigenous, Black, racialized, and migrant workers are disproportionately represented in outdoor, physically demanding, and low-control jobs, making heat stress a clear case of environmental racism. Without enforceable standards, workers are left vulnerable and employers face little obligation to act until harm has already occurred.

Ontario's health and safety framework also continues to treat mental injury as secondary, despite the fact that psychological harm is recognized under workers' compensation legislation. Psychosocial hazards – including excessive workload, violence, harassment, trauma exposure, and lack of control – can be just as damaging as physical hazards. Yet they remain largely absent from OHS's prevention framework, and the Ministry of Labour frequently fails to acknowledge workplace mental injuries until after workers are harmed.

Finally, Ontario's health and safety system is weakened by insufficient enforcement. Too often, inspections are complaint-driven, reactive, and slow – placing the burden on workers to come forward, even when doing so risks retaliation. Penalties are frequently too small to deter violations and are treated as the cost of doing business rather than a meaningful consequence.

A modern health and safety system must be preventive, proportional, and grounded in the lived realities of workers.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- Amendments to the OHS to scale certified JHSC representation with workforce size, including a minimum of 2 certified worker members in workplaces with 20-199 employees; a minimum of 3 certified worker members in workplaces with 200-499 employees; and one additional certified worker member for every 500 employees thereafter
- Strong, enforceable protections against heat stress, including adoption of the *Heat Stress Act* (private member's Bill 36); legal incorporation of the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Humidex-Based Heat Stress Calculator into OHS; and clear authority to issue stop-work orders when heat poses a danger to workers
- Recognition of heat stress as an environmental justice issue, with protections designed to address the disproportionate impact on Indigenous, Black, racialized, and migrant workers
- Full recognition of psychological and mental injuries as occupational illnesses under OHS, including amending the definition of occupational illness in Section 1 to explicitly include psychological injury; embedding psychosocial hazards within the hierarchy of controls and requiring genuine consultation with JHSCs; and clarifying employer, constructor, supervisor, and director duties under Sections 25 and 27 to address both physical and psychological harm
- Inclusion of psychosocial hazards on WSIB Exposure Incident Form 3958A, enabling workers to report mental injury risks before harm occurs
- A strengthened, well-resourced Ministry of Labour with real enforcement power, including proactive inspections that do not rely on worker complaints, provide the authority to investigate and issue binding orders quickly, and offer penalties that meaningfully deter violations

## POWER IN COMMUNITIES

### Health Care

Ontario's health system is being pushed past its breaking point – not because people are using too much care, but because public capacity has been deliberately starved.

The Financial Accountability Office estimates that health sector spending would need to grow by 4.0% annually over the next three years just to maintain current service levels. Yet Ontario continues to rank near the bottom of the country in health funding. In 2022, Ontario had the second-lowest age-standardized per-capita provincial health spending and the lowest age-standardized per-capita hospital funding in Canada.<sup>vi</sup>

The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports that over the past decade, Ontario hospitals experienced seven years of real per-capita funding cuts, meaning funding failed to keep pace with inflation and population growth. The result is a system operating in permanent deficit. And according to the Ontario Hospital Association, nearly half of Ontario's hospitals ran deficits in 2023-24, and most are expected to do so again in 2024-25 – with smaller and northern hospitals hit hardest.<sup>vii</sup>

This chronic underfunding has produced one of the most under-capacity hospital systems in the industrialized world. Ontario now ranks 33rd out of 38 OECD countries in staffed hospital beds per capita and has the second-lowest bed capacity in Canada. Hallway medicine is no longer a warning sign – it is the baseline.<sup>viii</sup>

Instead of rebuilding public capacity, the Ford government has deepened Ontario's dependence on private providers, particularly for-profit staffing agencies. Over the last decade, Ontario hospitals paid \$9.2 billion to private agencies, while real per-capita spending on agency staff nearly doubled, even as spending on public hospital workers barely grew. In northern and rural regions, agency costs have exploded by 200 to 480 per cent, draining hospital budgets and hollowing out the public workforce.<sup>ix</sup>

This is a vicious cycle: as wages and working conditions deteriorate in public hospitals, workers leave – and hospitals are forced to pay at least three times as much to private agencies to fill the gaps.<sup>x</sup>

Fast-growing and highly racialized regions such as Brampton, Scarborough, Durham, Markham, and Vaughan now have some of the lowest public staffing rates in the province, despite experiencing the fastest population growth. The communities with the greatest need are being served by the weakest public infrastructure.<sup>xi</sup>

Access to primary care is also collapsing according to Ontario's Auditor General.

More than two million Ontarians do not have a family doctor, yet the province's own Health Care Connect system reaches only a small fraction of those in need. Over 100,000 have waited more than a year for a doctor,<sup>xii</sup> while billions flow through a physician billing system that still lacks basic safeguards against abuse – with as much as \$665 million per year potentially lost to improper billing.<sup>xiii</sup>

Even where public dollars are being spent, mismanagement has compounded the damage. Supply Ontario has written off \$1.4 billion in expired or unusable PPE, including equipment that never met basic health standards – a staggering waste of public funds that could have strengthened front-line care.<sup>xiv</sup>

Nowhere are the consequences more severe than in long-term care. The province promised that every resident would receive four hours of hands-on care per day by 2024-25. Instead, some homes still deliver barely one hour, while others meet or exceed the interim target of 3 hours and 42 minutes – a gap that determines whether residents are safe, engaged, and dignified, or left isolated and neglected. Low staffing means more falls, more bedsores, more hospitalizations, and more use of restraints.<sup>xv</sup>

Despite these failures, the government continues to renew and expand licences for poorly performing homes, while falling far short of its own goal to build or upgrade 58,000 long-term care beds by 2028.<sup>xvi</sup>

This is not inefficiency.

It is the predictable result of underfunding, privatization, and the erosion of public accountability.

Ontario's health system is being governed as a market instead of a public good – and the cost is being paid in overcrowded hospitals, inaccessible care, exhausted workers, and preventable suffering.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- An immediate \$2 billion annual increase in hospital funding to stabilize finances and expand capacity
- A comprehensive public health care workforce and capital strategy to meet population growth and aging
- A ban on for-profit staffing agencies, replaced with a public sector staffing system
- Real enforcement of long-term care staffing standards so every resident receives the care they were promised
- A halt to licence extensions for poor-performing long-term care operators
- Strong oversight of physician billing and procurement systems to stop waste and redirect resources to patient care

## Education

Ontario's public education system is being pushed to a breaking point – not because schools are failing, but because they are being systematically starved.

School boards are now receiving \$260 less per student than they did in 2018-19 after inflation and enrolment growth. For the 2025-26 school year alone, that represents a \$561.7 million funding gap, and over the past seven years, Ontario's schools have lost \$6.35 billion in real funding.<sup>xvii</sup>

These cuts show up in classrooms every day. Class sizes are growing. Specialized supports are disappearing. Teachers and education workers are being asked to manage more students with fewer resources, even as school-based violence, behavioural needs, and mental health challenges are rising. Students who need individual attention are not getting it, and educators are being put in unsafe and unsustainable working conditions.

This is not an accident. Smaller class sizes are one of the most proven ways to improve student learning, reduce violence, and support students with complex needs – but they require investment. Instead of funding classrooms, the Ford government has chosen to strip resources out of schools and then blame local governance for the predictable consequences.

Bill 33, the *Supporting Children and Students Act*, does not address the conditions driving harm in schools – overcrowded classrooms, staffing shortages, or unmet student needs. Instead, it concentrates decision-making power with the Minister while leaving schools underfunded and overstretched. For more than 175 years, locally elected trustees have provided accountability to parents, caregivers, and communities. Replacing them with government-appointed supervisors weakens democratic oversight without improving safety or learning conditions.

Ontario's students do not need more surveillance or centralized control. They need smaller classes, more teachers and education workers, and fully funded supports that allow schools to meet real student needs.

This is not a governance problem.

It is a funding problem.

A province that cuts billions from classrooms while consolidating political control is not strengthening public education – it is undermining it and leaving students and educators to absorb the harm.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- The immediate elimination of the \$260 per-student funding gap and full restoration of the \$6.35 billion lost since 2018
- Permanent education funding tied to inflation and enrolment growth
- Smaller class sizes across Ontario, especially in high-needs and rapidly growing communities
- Thousands more education workers to support student learning, safety, and well-being
- Fully funded mental health and special education services in every school
- The repeal of Bill 33 and the protection of locally elected school boards
- An end to government takeovers of democratically elected boards
- A public education system built on investment, not control

## **Child Care**

Ontario's child care system is under severe strain – not because families suddenly need care, but because public infrastructure has failed to keep pace with that need.

While Ontario committed to creating 86,000 new spaces by 2026, the Financial Accountability Office projects that more than 220,000 children will still be left without access. Demand has surged under the \$10-a-day program, but supply has not. Fees may have fallen on paper, but affordability is meaningless without availability. Families across the province now face historic waitlists, with infant care nearly unattainable.<sup>xviii</sup>

The result is predictable. Parents – most often mothers – are forced to delay returning to work, reduce hours, or leave the labour force altogether. Households lose income, children lose continuity of care, and employers lose skilled workers. The cost of system failure is being absorbed by families.

Instead of stabilizing the system, the Ford government has doubled down on a model that channels public dollars into for-profit operators. In 2025, the Auditor General confirmed that Ontario is not contributing its fair share to sustain the \$10-a-day program, and operators warn that centres – including large non-profits – are at risk of closure under the current funding formula.<sup>xix</sup>

Recent announcements extending the program have failed to address key elements of the original commitment, including the expansion of child care spaces, wage increases for early childhood educators, and maintaining a minimum 70 per cent share of non-profit provision. Parents and advocates continue to call on the provincial and federal governments to provide a clear, transparent plan to fully deliver on affordability, expansion, workforce growth, and public accountability.<sup>xx</sup>

At the same time, the workforce shortage has become a central barrier to access. Ontario is short 10,000 qualified Early Childhood Educators, and municipalities report that staffing constraints remain the single greatest obstacle to expanding spaces.

Wages remain far below what is required to recruit and retain skilled educators, even as the cost of living continues to rise.<sup>xxi</sup>

This is not a management problem.

It is a political choice.

A child care system built on low wages, unstable funding, and financialized delivery cannot deliver universal access. It produces scarcity, churn, and burnout – and then asks families to absorb the consequences. Ontario’s working people cannot build stable lives on a child care system designed around underinvestment and profit extraction.

### **Ontario’s working people demand:**

- A public, non-profit child care system that guarantees access, not just fee reductions
- Full funding so centres can operate sustainably without cutting services or staffing
- Enforceable protections against profiteering, ensuring public dollars are directed to care, not private extraction
- A province-wide wage grid for Early Childhood Educators that reflects their training, expertise, and essential role
- A long-term workforce strategy to recruit, train, and retain the educators needed to meet demand

## Post-Secondary Education

Ontario’s post-secondary system is under severe strain – not because students and institutions are failing, but because public funding has been deliberately withdrawn.

Ontario universities receive the lowest per-student funding in Canada and are funded at only 55 per cent of the national average. Over the last several years, universities have already absorbed nearly \$550 million in cuts; they are now projecting \$265 million in operating deficits in 2025-26, with deeper shortfalls ahead.<sup>xxii</sup>

This is happening even after tuition freezes, aggressive cost-cutting, and program closures – and after more than \$1 billion in revenue has been lost due to federal caps on international student visas. Universities are being asked to do more with less, while demand from Ontario students continues to grow.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Because of provincial funding caps, nearly 28,000 domestic students are currently enrolled without any provincial funding, and by 2030 an additional 77,000 students are

expected to seek a university place. The province is simply not funding the seats it needs.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Colleges are facing the same pattern of abandonment. Ontario ranks dead last in Canada for per-student college funding, at just 56 per cent of the national average. Provincial funding for colleges has fallen by 30 per cent since 2013-14, forcing institutions to turn to unstable and exploitative revenue sources just to keep their doors open.<sup>xxv</sup>

To survive, colleges were pushed to rely on unregulated international student tuition – a model that placed both, domestic and international students, at risk and has now collapsed. The result has been devastating: more than 650 programs cut and 10,000 jobs lost, shrinking access to education and training in communities across the province.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Students are paying the price. The affordability squeeze is driving growing mental health strain, as more students juggle multiple jobs while trying to keep up with coursework and living costs. Faculty and staff face rising workloads, while thousands are trapped in precarious contract positions with little job security or benefits.

This is not a market failure.

It is a political choice.

Ontario has chosen to underfund public post-secondary education and force institutions to behave like private enterprises – raising fees, cutting programs, and relying on unstable revenue instead of stable public investment.

A province that underinvests in education while expecting institutions to train the workforce, drive innovation, and support students is not planning for the future – it is hollowing it out.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- Sustainable funding for universities and colleges to at least the national average, to reflect real operating costs
- A significant increase of per student funding and emergency funding for all postsecondary institutions
- Targeted operating grants for northern, regional, and francophone/bilingual institutions that face higher delivery costs
- Stable funding to protect programs, jobs, and student services in every community
- An end to reliance on high international student tuition to subsidize public education

## Social Assistance

Ontario is now experiencing social need at a scale not seen in generations – not because people are failing, but because public systems are.

More than one million Ontarians relied on food banks last year, making 8.7 million visits, with both the number of users and visits rising for the ninth straight year. Nearly one in three food bank users is a child, and almost one in four is working – a devastating indictment of an economy in which employment no longer protects people from hunger. When people who are working and raising families cannot meet their basic needs, the problem is not individual behaviour.<sup>xxvii</sup>

It is a system failure.

The burden of that failure is not shared equally. Racialized families, people with disabilities, single mothers, newcomers, and Indigenous communities are being pushed to a breakpoint first – and deepest.

Food banks themselves are now warning they are at the brink. Half say they fear they will run out of food, and one in three may be forced to reduce or suspend services because demand has overwhelmed what remains of the charitable safety net. Charity is being asked to substitute for public policy – and it is collapsing under the weight.<sup>xxviii</sup>

This breakdown is being driven by income support programs that no longer serve their most basic purpose: preventing poverty.

A single person on Ontario Works can receive as little as \$733 per month for shelter and basic needs combined. Even Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which tops out at \$1,408 per month, leaves people thousands of dollars below the poverty line and far below what it costs to rent, eat, and live in any Ontario community.

Even after a 2.8% increase in 2025, ODSP rates remain deeply inadequate – an increase ACORN notes is the lowest inflation-based adjustment since indexing began in 2022. Indexing preserves the status quo. It does not repair decades of erosion. It locks in poverty at a slightly slower pace.<sup>xxix</sup>

The result is entirely predictable. People who should be protected by public systems are pushed into food banks, overcrowded housing, debt, and crisis. Emergency rooms, shelters, and child protection agencies then absorb the fallout – at far greater human and fiscal cost.

This is not a budgetary constraint.

It is a political choice.

Nowhere is that choice more visible than in Ontario's disability systems.

More than 61,000 children are waiting for autism services. Another 52,000 adults with developmental disabilities are waiting for support. According to the Ontario Autism Coalition, the backlog has nearly tripled since the Conservatives took office – despite repeated promises to eliminate it.<sup>xxx</sup>

Families now wait more than five years for children to access core clinical services. Fewer than one in four registered children receives the therapy they were promised. Parents are forced to drain savings, quit jobs, or leave children without care entirely.<sup>xxxi</sup>

This is not inefficiency. It is the predictable result of chronic underfunding and the outsourcing of care in systems that depend on long-term, skilled, relational support.

A province where working people go hungry, people with disabilities are priced out of housing, and children wait years for care is not being governed responsibly – it is being governed through neglect.

**Ontario's working people demand:**

- A permanent doubling of Ontario Works and ODSP rates so that no one is forced to survive below the poverty line
- Full, permanent indexing of social assistance to inflation, with immediate rate adjustments to reflect the true cost of living
- Housing allowances that match real market rents by city and region, so income supports actually cover the cost of shelter
- An end to spousal income and benefit clawbacks, which punish people for forming families and trap recipients in financial dependence
- Emergency funding to eliminate autism and developmental disability waitlists, ensuring every child and adult receives the care they are entitled to
- A comprehensive poverty-reduction strategy that guarantees food security, housing stability, and access to essential services rather
- A social services system built on public responsibility, not crisis management, with sustained investments in the workers and infrastructure that make care possible

## Housing & Homelessness

Ontario is facing accelerating homelessness and housing insecurity – not because renters have failed, but because public protections have been dismantled while rents and evictions have surged.

More than 80,000 Ontarians were unhoused in 2024, a figure that has grown by over 50 per cent since 2016. Chronic homelessness has tripled, and without a major policy shift, as many as 300,000 people could be unhoused in an economic downturn.<sup>xxxii</sup>

This crisis is unfolding alongside record-high rents, rising eviction filings, and historic backlogs at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) – conditions that expose the consequences of policy choices that prioritize market activity over housing stability.

Ontario’s housing crisis is not the result of insufficient capital, but of misdirected investment. While governments announce housing investments, developers are increasingly sitting on land as speculative assets, even as the real estate market softens and housing need grows.

Public housing investments must be directed toward non-profit, cooperative, and geared-to-income housing, where affordability and public benefit are protected over the long term. Where provincial subsidies are provided to private developers, those funds must be tied to binding conditions that ensure public benefit, including commitments to workers, fair wages, and community reinvestment.

Housing policy that relies on unconditional private investment will continue to produce profit without affordability. Accountability is not a barrier to building housing – it is the only way to ensure housing investments serve people, not extraction.

And, instead of strengthening tenant protections and investing in affordable housing, the Ford government passed Bill 60, the *Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act* – legislation that does the opposite.

Bill 60 strips away tenant protections that took decades to build, weakening rent control, security of tenure, and access to justice. Despite its name, it fast-tracks evictions, not homes, prioritizing landlord and investor profits over housing stability.

The government claims Bill 60 will “unlock housing supply,” but there is no evidence that deregulating tenant protections creates affordable housing. What it does create is greater financialization, higher turnover, and more displacement – the very forces driving Ontario’s homelessness numbers upward.

Renters are already facing record housing costs, rising eviction rates, and unprecedented waits at the LTB. Bill 60 makes every one of those pressures worse by restricting tenants’ ability to challenge unjust decisions and tilting the system further toward large landlords and corporate owners.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

This is not about speeding up housing.

It is about reshaping Ontario's housing system to favour profit over people.

Ontario is the only province that has downloaded social housing to municipalities, forcing cities to spend more than \$2.1 billion a year just to manage homelessness and housing instability.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Bill 60 compounds that failure by making housing even more precarious, ensuring more people are pushed into shelters, encampments, and emergency systems.

A province that weakens tenant protections while homelessness is rising is not governing responsibly – it is manufacturing displacement.

**Ontario's working people demand:**

- The repeal of Bill 60 and the restoration of strong tenant protections
- Provincial housing subsidies and incentives to private developers be conditional on public benefit, including affordability requirements, timelines for construction, fair wages, and community reinvestment, rather than provided unconditionally
- Rent control, secure tenancies, and full access to the LTB
- Large-scale public investment in non-profit, co-operative, and deeply affordable housing
- Eviction-prevention and housing-stability programs
- The upload of housing and homelessness responsibility from municipalities back to the province
- A housing system built around stability, not financial extraction

## EQUITY IN COMMUNITIES

Equity is not a separate policy area – it is a measure of whether public systems are working for the people who are most exposed to harm, exclusion, and violence. Across Ontario, women; Indigenous, Black, and racialized peoples; 2SLGBTQIA+ communities; people with disabilities; and newcomers continue to face systemic barriers to safety, health care, and dignity because governments have failed to act on clear evidence and long-standing recommendations.

For Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities; newcomers; and people with disabilities, these failures are compounded by poverty, housing insecurity, and unequal access to health and social services – placing them at heightened risk of violence, institutional harm, and exclusion from public life. When public systems are underfunded or poorly designed, these communities are the first to lose access and the last to be protected.

Gender-based and intimate partner violence remains pervasive and deadly. Treating this violence as an individual or criminal issue rather than a public health emergency has left survivors without the coordinated supports they need and has allowed preventable harm to continue. The 2015 Culleton, Kuzy, Warmerdam murders inquest provided a clear, evidence-based roadmap to prevent intimate partner violence from escalating to femicide. Yet its recommendations remain unimplemented.

At the same time, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples remains stalled.

Public recognition, accountability, and action are essential to addressing the ongoing impacts of colonial violence, including the disproportionate rates of violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people, as well as barriers to housing, health care, and justice. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) all outline what governments must do. Delay is not defensible.

Equity gaps are also embedded in Ontario's health care system. Young women are routinely denied medically necessary breast reduction surgery based on assumptions about future childbearing, despite well-documented links to chronic pain, mobility limitations, delayed cancer detection, and mental health impacts. For women with disabilities and chronic pain, these denials compound barriers to care, employment, and economic security. These decisions reinforce gender bias in health care and increase long-term costs to both individuals and the public system.

For 2SLGBTQIA+ Ontarians, exclusion and danger persist in public and workplace spaces. Gendered washrooms and changerooms continue to expose transgender, gender non-conforming, and gender-diverse people to harassment, discrimination, and violence – despite the fact that these facilities are built, regulated, and funded by public authorities. Gender-affirming health care and social services remain underfunded and difficult to access across the province, leaving many without essential care and supports.

These are not gaps in knowledge.

They are gaps in political will.

An equity-based budget must move beyond symbolic commitments and deliver concrete action that protects safety, dignity, accessibility, and full participation in public life for everyone in Ontario.

### **Ontario's working people demand:**

- The immediate declaration of gender-based and intimate partner violence as an epidemic, using a public health framework and informed by survivors, Indigenous communities, medical professionals, and frontline organizations
- Full implementation of all 85 recommendations of the Culleton, Kuzy, Warmerdam murders inquest, with sustained funding for prevention, survivor supports, and community-based services
- The establishment of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation as a statutory holiday, and meaningful public commemoration led in partnership with Indigenous peoples
- Provincial implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and the 231 Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, with accountability timelines
- The passage of UNDRIP into provincial law
- Universal, non-discriminatory coverage of medically necessary breast reduction surgery, regardless of age or reproductive status, and education for health-care providers to eliminate gender bias
- Mandatory gender-neutral washrooms and changerooms in all publicly accessed and government buildings, with building permits conditioned on inclusive design standards
- Restored and expanded funding for gender-affirming health care and social services across Ontario, ensuring timely, equitable access for all who need care

## **CONCLUSION**

Equity is inseparable from labour rights, housing security, and public investment. When wages are suppressed, housing is unaffordable, care is inaccessible, and democratic protections are weakened, the burden falls first and hardest on racialized communities, people with disabilities, women, Indigenous peoples, and 2SLGBTQIA+ Ontarians. An equity-based budget is not about targeted programs alone – it is about rebuilding public systems so that power, safety, and opportunity are not reserved for the few – but shared by all.

This submission has shown that Ontario's current challenges are not the result of inevitability or external shocks. They are the cumulative outcome of deliberate policy choices: tax cuts that shrink public revenue, chronic underfunding of essential services, privatization that diverts public dollars into profit, and repeated attacks on workers' rights and democratic accountability.

The consequences are visible everywhere – in hospitals operating beyond capacity, classrooms stretched thin, child care systems that promise affordability without access, colleges and universities forced to cut programs, workers still waiting to be paid what they are owed, and communities struggling to respond to rising homelessness and violence. These failures are interconnected, and they demand a coherent response.

Ontario has the fiscal capacity, the workforce, and the evidence to do better. What is missing is political will.

The choices facing the province are clear. Ontario can continue down a path that weakens public systems and deepens inequality, or it can choose to reinvest – in workers, in care, in housing, and in democratic public institutions that serve everyone.

The Ontario Federation of Labour calls on the provincial government to choose the latter – and to deliver a budget that restores public capacity, strengthens workers' power, and builds a province where dignity, security, and opportunity are not privileges, but rights.

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