

SHOW US THE MONEY!

Income Security in Ontario



Provincial Election 2022

INCOME SECURITY in ONTARIO

Since this province's last election, Ontarians have experienced negative impacts on many fronts when it comes to income, expenses, economic security, and overall affordability. While the pandemic highlighted multiple cracks in the system, many potential income tools were cancelled or slashed shortly after the 2018 election, over two years before COVID-19.

For example, a promised \$15 minimum wage from the outgoing Liberals, was "paused" at \$14 by the new government in January 2019, and indexed to inflation. Three years later, the majority Conservatives reset the wage at \$15/hour. Meanwhile, in 23 Ontario communities where the 2021 living wage was calculated, the lowest rate was found in Sault Ste. Marie, at \$16.20, \$1.85 above the provincial minimum wage at the time.

The pandemic exacerbated the need for paid sick days, especially after the two paid sick days introduced in 2017 had been cancelled by the new government. Workers and advocates demanded 10 paid sick days instead of the three unpaid days the new government offered. The calls went unheeded until April 2021, over a year into the pandemic, when the Conservatives relented and offered a shorter and temporary measure. The three paid sick days will come to an end on July 31, 2022.

On July 31, 2018, the government cut a scheduled three percent increase to social assistance rates by half, along with allowances which would have seen people able to keep more of their part-time employment earnings.

That same day the Basic Income Pilot Project, once promised to be kept by the now elected Premier Ford, was cancelled just a year into its three-years of potential change. Even with the evidence of just one first year, the pilot proved extremely beneficial for those who accessed it, as documented in this study, McMaster, March 2020.

Finally, while Ontario became the last province to sign onto the federal child care plan in late March this year, there are still many inequities in the system. Demands for expansion of affordable non-profit and public child care spots with decent work and pay provisions for all child care workers need to be made loud and clear.

MINIMUM WAGE ≠ A LIVING WAGE



Minimum wage is the lowest legal hourly rate an employer can pay an employee. In 2018, minimum wage was \$14/hour, with an increase to \$15 scheduled for 2019.

However, the newly elected government stalled the planned increase at \$14, but tied it to inflation. In November 2021, the Ford government raised the wage to \$15 and then more recently promised another 50 cent raise for October, if re-elected.

However, this still leaves the minimum wage well below the living wage, which ranges between \$16.20 in Sault Ste. Marie and \$22.08 in Toronto.

The \$15 minimum wage was also announced to apply to Ontario's workers in the gig economy such as shared rides or food delivery services.

While this is to be welcomed, it has many shortcomings in its current shape. For example, gig workers whose work is platform-based, will only be paid for "engaged time," while making deliveries, but not the time involved in returning from the delivery or waiting for an order.

Another issue is related to the classification of workers. Companies that are platform-based, wrongly classify their employees as independent contractors, cheating them out of decent wages, overtime pay, paid leave, EI, and all other employment protections.

**Current minimum wage,
\$15/hour**

**Living Wage, Hamilton (2021)
\$17.20**

**Living Wage, Halton (2021)
\$20.75**

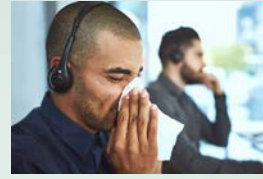
Questions for Candidates



- ***Minimum wages consign people to poverty and precarity. Where does your party stand on moving Ontario's workers beyond a basic minimum wage, toward a minimum wage of at least \$20 an hour?***
- ***What will your party do to protect app-based gig workers and ensure they receive wages the wholetime they are working?***
- ***How will your party resolve the misclassification of employees?***



Paid Sick Days



As a new report from the Workers' Action Centre states, "The COVID pandemic has confirmed that staying home when sick is fundamental to individual health, public health and the economy."

How is that possible when most Ontario workers are only entitled to three days of unpaid sick leave a year?

Aside from the absence of paid sick days for most Ontario workers, "[From the Frontlines: An urgent agenda for decent work](#)," reports 82% of workers would rather go to work sick than obtain a doctor's note.

According to Armine Yalnizyan, Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, 58% of workers in Canada do not have permanent paid sick days. That proportion rises to 70% for workers earning less than \$25,000 per year.

COVID highlighted "essential workers," who kept the economy going and the reality was clear - [Black, migrant, Indigenous, and workers of colour](#) - disproportionately women - bear the burdens of frontline work and had the least access to sick days.

In April 2021, the government introduced the COVID-19 Worker Income Protection Benefit. This provided for three paid sick days for workers impacted by COVID-19. It was totally inadequate when the professional guidance around self-isolating after a positive test was 10 days. Even worse, the benefit is set to expire on July 31.



ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

Why do paid sick days matter? Ensuring employers have paid sick days means a workplace is safer and healthier for everyone because staff members don't come in sick. They also alleviate workers' concerns about lost income if they miss a day of work.

Paid sick days are a smart retention strategy, as employees stay longer when there are paid sick days and employee benefits, saving employers valuable resources when they don't have to recruit and re-train new employees.

The Ontario Nonprofit Network has further information on how to advocate for paid sick days with your political representatives. You can read more [here](#).

Questions for Candidates



- ***Will your party require employers to provide at least 10 employer-paid emergency leave days per year plus an additional 14 paid days during public health outbreaks?***
- ***Will your party prevent employers from requiring employees to provide doctor's notes to access paid emergency leave days?***

Social Assistance Rates and Rules



Social assistance rates are well below the poverty line in Ontario, and are lower in real dollars than the amount people received in the mid-1990's. (See graph below.)

Ontario Works (OW) & and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates need to be raised over time to the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty line, and thereafter indexed to inflation rates.

According to the Income Security Advocacy Centre:

- People living on social assistance live in deep poverty.
- They can't afford adequate food, decent housing and medical supplies.
- Almost 60% of food bank users are on social assistance.
- Their situation is becoming more desperate because rates have been frozen since 2018, while inflation continues to increase.

Ontario Works (OW) for a single person

\$733 a month

50% of the poverty line

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rate for a single person

\$1,169 a month

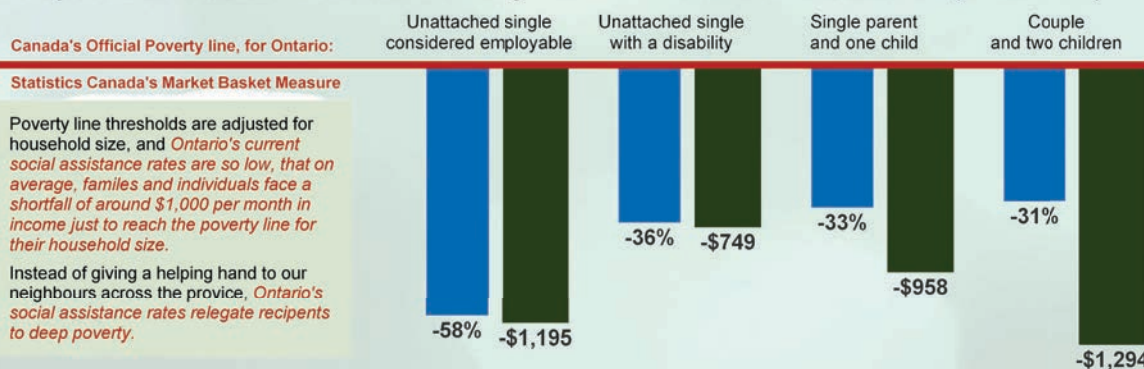
75% of the poverty line

Questions for Candidates



- *Will you vote for a significant and immediate raise to social assistance rates?*
- *What reforms to this broken system will you make, such as, separating social assistance rates into housing and basic needs amounts to make housing more accessible?*
- *Will your party commit to ending all clawbacks so people in poverty are not penalized for accessing other benefits or earning small incomes?*

Ontario's Social Assistance Income and Benefits (including provincial and federal tax benefits), by Selected Household Types, Compared to Canada's Official Poverty Line for Ontario communities (2020 data)



- **Annual social assistance and benefits compared to poverty line: % deficit**
- **Monthly shortfall in income just to reach poverty line** (Data source: Welfare in Canada, 2020)

Basic Income



In 2016, the Ontario Liberal government announced the launch of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP). Three Ontario pilot locations were identified – Hamilton, Thunder Bay and Lindsay – and a year later, payments began.

Single people received up to \$16,989 per year, while couples could receive \$24,027 per year. People with disabilities received a \$500 top-up to their ODSP payments.

The following year, the arrival of the Conservative party into government spelled the premature end of the OBIP. Benefits continued to be paid until March 2019, but research was ended immediately.

Research from McMaster University sought to uncover how basic income impacted people in key areas of their lives.

- Everyone who received basic income reported benefitting in some way.
- Many recipients reported improvements in their physical and mental health, labour, market participation, food security, housing stability, financial status and social relationships.
- Basic income also had a noticeable impact on the use of health services, with many of the survey respondents indicating less frequent visits to health practitioners and hospital emergency rooms.



Basic Income Candidate Pledge Where do your candidates stand?

With a few short clicks, you can email all the registered candidates in your riding, letting them know their stance on Basic Income is important to secure your vote and asking them to take the pledge. You can also see which candidates have taken the pledge by clicking [here](#).

Questions for Candidates

- ***Ontario had a basic income pilot prematurely shelved in 2019. Where does your party stand on reintroducing a basic income in Ontario?***
- ***Will you, as a candidate, sign the Basic Income Pledge?***



Child Care



As one of this country's most expensive provinces for child care, Ontario's reluctance to sign onto the federal child care agreement was difficult to watch. In the end, it is seen as a life-changing policy for many families.

Under the terms of the new plan, childcare costs are set to come down this month by 25%, retroactive to April 1, with up to 50% savings by the end of the year. By March 2026, delivery of "on average \$10-a-day child care for Ontario families," is slated to be on the books and a historic win for gender equality.

However, advocates have been clear that in order for the plan to succeed, it must include a workforce strategy to recruit and retain child care workers.

A new campaign from the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, responds to what it calls, "a workforce crisis, brought on by low wages, challenging working conditions and chronic underfunding."

"[A Workforce at Breaking Point: Rising Up](#)," notes, "the pandemic has exacerbated this longstanding crisis in Ontario to the point that child care programs are now being forced to close rooms, limit enrolment, or change operating hours because they are unable to retain their current staff and recruit new staff."

Their first demand is a salary grid ensuring at least a \$25 per hour starting wage for non-qualified staff; a \$30 per hour starting wage for Early Childhood Educators; a daily rate minimum for licensed home child care providers; and a commensurate benefits package for all.

A WORKFORCE AT BREAKING POINT RISING UP



The AECEO and OCBCC are sharing the stories of ECEs and raising our voices together about the early learning and child care workforce crisis. It is critical the issues facing the child care workforce are addressed in the federal-provincial funding agreement. We are calling for a wage grid and decent work standards as essential elements in a federal-provincial agreement.

A Workforce at Breaking Point letter (PDF) with signatures and comments from 1500+ of ECEs and child care workers was sent to the Premier and Minister of Education in March 2022.

You can find it [here](#).

Questions for Candidates



- ***Will you put an end to the salary restrictions of Bill 124 and ensure a fair salary grid for non-qualified and ECEs?***
- ***Will your party bring about Decent Work Standards that support paid planning time, permanent paid sick and emergency leave days?***

Additional Resources



On May 18, 2022, the [SPRC](#) and [CDH](#) hosted ***SHOW ME THE MONEY: Income Security in Ontario***. Speakers from the Workers' Action Centre, Justice For Workers, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, presented up to date information to consider heading to the polls. The following links provide more detailed information about each of the issues covered that night, and suggested questions to promote dialogue with candidates.



[From the Frontlines - An Urgent Agenda for Decent Work](#)

[Justice for Workers Means Racial Justice, Primer 2022](#)

[2022 Provincial Election Toolkit - Decent Work and Where the Parties Stand](#)



[Provincial Election 2022 Participation Guide](#)



[Ontario's Social Assistance Rates should be an election issue](#) - John Stapleton and Yvonne Yuan, The Toronto Star

COALITION ONTARIENNE POUR
de meilleurs services
éducatifs à l'enfance



ONTARIO COALITION FOR
Better Child Care

[Child Care is Worth More!](#)



[YWCA Ontario - Choose Gender Equity](#)

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CDH and SPRC are located on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation as well as the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Neutral and the Haudenosaunee peoples of the Six Nations Grand River Territory, as determined by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Agreement.

