



Ontario Budget 2024: YWCA Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

January 31, 2024

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
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Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy:

YWCA Ontario is a provincial coalition of YWCA Member Associations that serves more than 40,000 people each year across Ontario. We offer a range of programs to meet the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people across the province. Our programming includes housing and shelter, employment and training, child care, and many other supportive and life-stabilizing services for the communities we serve. Through systemic advocacy, we also work to advance substantive gender and racial equity in our province.

A strong and vibrant nonprofit sector is the backbone of a thriving economy. Ontario must not lose sight of the hard lessons learned throughout the pandemic, nor the lasting, brutal impacts it continues to have on women, gender diverse people and their families – particularly those working in the nonprofit/care sector. Our policy recommendations in this pre-budget submission outline a course forward that will bring the nonprofit sector back from the brink of collapse and rebuild a healthy, sustainable, more equitable sector.

To support an equitable, gender-responsive 2024 budget that enables economic prosperity for women, girls and gender diverse people in Ontario, the YWCA Ontario Coalition recommends the Province:

1. Adequately Invest in the Canada-Ontario Child Care Plan

A high-quality, accessible and affordable child care system is the lynchpin in a high-functioning and prosperous economy. We applaud the Ontario government's commitment to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) plan. However, the work of developing a plan that works for all Ontarians is not finished. As pointed out by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) in their 2024 pre-budget submission,



provincial child care allocations are in decline rather than increasing. In order to meet the province's target of creating 85,000 new child care spaces by 2026 these allocations must see an increase.¹ Operations funding has not risen to meet the increasing demand for spaces and municipal service delivery partners are responsible for meeting shortfalls in the face of their own impossible budgets.

We echo recommendations from OCBCC:²

- Immediately increase the sector's general operating funding by at least \$500 Million and provide predictable, year-over-year increases tied to inflation;
- Cancel the planned cut of \$85.5M to Service System Managers' funding and cost-share changes imposed on municipalities;
- Implement a needs-based funding formula that provides full and sufficient public funding for licensed child care programs; and,
- Match federal spending on the child care workforce and collaborate on the development of an early years and child care salary scale which includes:
 - a starting rate of at least \$30-40 per hour for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE);
 - a starting rate of at least \$25 for non-RECE staff; and
 - pension and benefits plans.³

2. Ensure decent work conditions for women - and all workers

Across the province, workers are facing soaring rates of inflation, increasing housing costs and stagnating wages. As Ontario families navigate the cost of living crisis, having decent working conditions is critical to ensuring families can stay in their homes, pay for their groceries, contribute to the economy and ultimately survive. Employment and labour standards must be advanced, comprehensive and consider the unique realities of the care economy and other feminized industries.

We welcome the government's increase to the minimum wage; however, as the Workers' Action Centre has stated, "it still isn't enough."⁴

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/canada-ontario-early-years-and-child-care-agreement>

² https://www.childcareontario.org/2024_ontario_child_care_funding_highlights_of_changes

³ https://www.childcareontario.org/2024_ontario_child_care_funding_highlights_of_changes

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-minimum-wage-rises-1.6983918>



We recommend the Province ensure decent work conditions by:

- Increasing the minimum wage to at least \$20 per hour;
- Revising employment standards legislation to introduce 10 permanent paid sick days, plus an additional 14 during public health emergencies, allowing all workers in the province to have access to minimum employment standards; and
- Dropping the Bill 124 appeal which disproportionately impacts feminized sectors and fields that support women, girls and gender diverse people, such as transitional housing and shelter services, child care, and nursing – workers from the very fields that bore the brunt of the pandemic.

3. Address the housing crisis

Currently, there are 735,000 Ontarians in need of core housing⁵ and 215,000 on social housing wait lists.⁶ Women, girls and gender diverse people are among the most impacted by the housing crisis facing Ontarians today. 23.6 percent of single mother-led households and 15.6 percent of women-led households are in core housing need in Ontario.⁷ The housing crisis and gender-based violence are intrinsically linked; survivors of gender-based violence are more likely to become unhoused due to a lack of access to safe and secure housing. The Ontario government has shown a commitment to addressing the province's housing crisis; however, as the crisis continues to mount more aggressive policies and substantial investments are necessary to intervene. To address the housing crisis in Ontario, we recommend the following:

- Invest in a range of supportive housing for specific communities of women including Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, newcomer women, senior women, women with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals and other communities who experience systemic marginalization.
- Invest in culturally responsive housing supports to ensure women, particularly those who are survivors of violence, and those with experiences of chronic homelessness, institutionalization and substance use, can maintain housing.

⁵ Statistics Canada defines “core housing need” as a private household's housing falling below at least one of the indicator thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability, and that household having to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that meets all indicators.

⁶ https://www.oaeh.ca/oaeh-response-to-changes-to-the-municipal-service-agreements/#_ftn1

⁷ <https://hart.ubc.ca/housing-needs-assessment-tool/>



- Invest in a long-term provincial Portable Housing Benefit to supplement the one-time Federal housing benefit to ensure women and other people experiencing income instability can maintain their housing.
- Infuse an additional \$60 million into the core operating budgets of Violence Against Women shelters and transitional housing to address funding shortfalls resulting from chronic underfunding of these vital services.⁸
- As suggested by the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario, invest in the creation of 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next 10 years to meet the needs of individuals living with mental health issues.⁹

4. Establish a Home in Government for the Nonprofit Sector

The nonprofit sector is a significant economic driver in Ontario. It contributes \$65 billion annually to the provincial GDP and employs more than 844,000 people, according to the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN). The size of our sector's impact on the economy is similar to that of manufacturing and automotive sectors. Per ONN, "with every \$1.00 investment, nonprofits generate up to \$2.18 in GDP impact, \$1.76 in employment income impact, and create 1.5 jobs with every million dollars in output."¹⁰

We echo the calls of the Ontario Nonprofit Network¹¹:

- Establish a home in government to efficiently work with the over 58,000 nonprofits, charities, and grassroots groups in Ontario.
- Future-proof Ontarians' social infrastructure with investments that reflect the true cost of service and program delivery to take the pressure off of institutional settings, like hospitals and long-term care.
- Address the nonprofit human resource crisis to ensure Ontarians have access to community support.
- Make government activities deliver twice as much for communities by implementing strategies for community benefit agreements and social procurement.
- Enable communities to develop the infrastructure they need with access to capital and lands.

⁸ [Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses \(OAITH\) 2023 Pre-Budget Submission](#)

⁹ https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CMHAOn_Housing_First_2020_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ <https://theonncan.ca/publication/pre-budget-submission-2024/>

¹¹ <https://theonncan.ca/publication/pre-budget-submission-2024/>



5. Enhance social assistance rates

For women, children, and gender diverse people living in low-income households, the ability to meet their needs and work toward greater economic prosperity is harder now than ever. Current Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates and Ontario Works (OW) rates are far too low to adequately cover the cost of living, with a single person on ODSP in the province receiving \$1,308 (nearly \$1,000 below the poverty line) and a single parent only receiving \$1,903 (nearly half of the low-income measure).¹² These rates are far below the average cost of living for nearly any city in Ontario. The impacts of these rates further exacerbate disparities in income, health and social wellbeing, particularly for single-mothers, women and girls living with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women and newcomers. The stark reality is that one in five single mothers in Canada raise their children in poverty.¹³

With one in ten Ontarians now accessing food banks, the dependency we are seeing on social services is extremely worrisome. In 2023, one in four food bank clients were children/youth, and 35% of food bank clients had a disability.¹⁴

We ask that your government take action to address poverty across the province by:

- Immediately doubling OW and ODSP rates and indexing OW to inflation annually, and increasing the OW earnings exemption to match ODSP;
- Ensuring that once implemented, the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) serves as a supplement — not as a replacement — to ODSP and OW and/or private disability-related benefits and that there are no provincial clawbacks of the benefit;
- Increasing the Ontario Child Benefit and removing all immigration status-based barriers that prevent access to provincial child benefits; and,
- Ensuring women and all people with precarious immigration status have access to income support and an expedited path to permanent residency.

6. Invest in employment, training and upskilling for women workers

Ontario is facing a severe labour shortage across many industries. At the same time, many women and gender-diverse individuals who are willing and eager to fill those jobs are

¹² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110023201>

¹³ <https://womenshomelessness.ca/women-girls-homelessness-in-canada/>

¹⁴ <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/research/whos-hungry-report/>



unable to access affordable training they need to secure employment. It is imperative to recruit more women into roles in traditionally male-dominated fields and ensure that women have the skills they need to enter and excel in lucrative, secure, and in-demand roles in fields such as the skilled trades, data science and advanced manufacturing.

To ensure women are empowered to reach their full economic potential, we recommend:

- Investing in multi-year funding for employment, training, and upskilling programs for women and ensuring such programs are offered by women-focused, nonprofit organizations;
- Modifying Employment Ontario to include women as a priority category in order to ensure clear gender targets in funding allocations; and
- Increasing funding for the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) and Language Training Program by a minimum of five percent to meet higher actual costs due to inflation and increased demand for services, and make targeted investments in employment and entrepreneurship programs for immigrants and refugees – particularly women, racialized workers and workers with disabilities.

7. Dedicate funding for girls' programming

The future of Ontario's success and prosperity depends on our current investment in today's children and youth. YWCA girls and youth programming provides essential support for participants by using strengths-based and trauma-informed programming and activities to develop healthy coping and self-regulation skills. These programs are essential in ensuring that girls and youth in this province have the mental, physical, emotional, and academic supports they need to thrive. Unfortunately, dedicated government funding for girls' and youth programming is nonexistent at any level of government putting this transformative programming in a precarious position.

To ensure organizations like ours can continue providing girls' programming, we recommend:

- Creating a \$30 million girls'-specific youth fund that women's organizations – and other organizations with emerging and established girls' programs – can access to enable organizations to continue providing responsive and supportive programming; and,



- Providing specific funding to help girls from low-income households access STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs.

8. Meaningfully address gender-based violence (GBV)

There were 62 recorded femicides of women and children in Ontario from 2022 to 2023.¹⁵

November 2023 saw a critical investment in the province's efforts to end gender-based violence by signing the Canada-Ontario bilateral agreement on the National Action Plan (NAP) to end Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Now, the province has a critical role to play in ensuring the proposed National Action Plan will meaningfully address the GBV crisis. The commitment to stabilize and strengthen the sector, which has long been strained, is especially integral to our work and ensuring women, girls and gender diverse people are well supported as they rebuild lives free from violence. We look forward to seeing the continued NAP rollout to ensure the \$162 million commitment by the province supports survivors, the sector, and efforts to prevent further gender-based violence.

To ensure that women, girls, and gender diverse people can lead lives free from violence and reach their full potential, we recommend your government:

- Prioritize NAP investments in existing core services (operating) and innovation (projects), along with measurable plans and strategies. This requires community input and guidance from care agency experts to ensure an intersectional and holistic lens;
- Take a multi-sectoral approach to addressing gender-based violence across the province, including creating and implementing a province-wide strategy to end GBV;
- Reinstigate the provincial roundtable to advise, inform, and monitor progress on the aforementioned strategy, ensuring the roundtable is informed and led by survivors, victims' families, service providers, and subject matter experts;
- Ensure all plans to address GBV are shaped by community input and guidance from GBV subject matter experts and consider the disparate experiences of violence encountered by Indigenous, Black, racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ women and gender diverse people and those living with disabilities; and
- Urgently prioritize the prevention of GBV by addressing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and declaring IPV an epidemic which would lead to action to address the gravity of this violence.

¹⁵ <https://www.oaith.ca/assets/library/uploads/2023-Annual-Femicide-List.pdf>



In closing, we look forward to opportunities to provide more input, participate in consultation and work with the Provincial government to improve the lives of, and opportunities for, women, girls, gender-diverse people and families.

Sincerely,

YWCA Cambridge
YWCA Durham
YWCA Hamilton
YW Kitchener-Waterloo
YWCA Muskoka
YWCA Niagara Region
YWCA Peterborough-Haliburton
YWCA Sudbury
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
YWCA Toronto