



We need provincial leadership to create new affordable housing in Ontario

Ontarians have a long wait for affordable housing in many communities across the province. There are 1,429 social housing units in Oxford County. Over 1,200 Oxford households are on the waiting list for rent geared to income housing. Across the province, the waiting list has grown by 25.6% over the last 10 years. We can't go on this way.

Increasing the stock of affordable housing

The Ontario government can take steps to make a real dent in the problem:

- Adopt a comprehensive housing strategy that includes bold targets and timelines for building new affordable housing
- Take leadership to safeguard and expand the stock of affordable co-op and non-profit housing
- Create a housing benefit that would make private, rental, co-op and non-profit housing more affordable, within a plan that safeguards and expands social housing
- Pass an inclusionary housing legislation that will allow municipalities to set policies that ensure a mix of affordable housing within new private sector residential developments

Ask your candidates:

- What will your party do to create affordable housing and safeguard existing stock?
- Does your party have targets and timelines for expanding the stock of affordable housing?
- Does your party support inclusionary housing legislation?

Resources:

- Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada: www.chfcanada.coop
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA): www.onpha.on.ca
- Wellesley Institute: www.wellesleyinstitute.com





There is no Oxford without the arts

Oxford County is home to a vibrant culture and arts scene. A critical part of our regional identity, it is also a tremendous economic engine for our region. Museums, art galleries, theatres, festivals, and more take place all year round. Oxford residents from every neighbourhood attend these events, often for free or at low cost. Arts programming in our communities enriches our lives and creates beauty in our environment as well as promoting cultural awareness, encouraging citizen engagement and helping to revitalize neighbourhoods.

Let's support our artists

Oxford County provided \$50,000 in funding in 2013 and the has approved the same amount for 2014. It is critically important that provincial spending on the arts is also maintained.

Although Oxford residents support the arts by buying tickets to events and governments underpin arts programming with grants, it is easily argued that the greatest investment in the arts comes from the artists themselves. Arts organizations frequently cannot pay artists fully for their time and artists pursuing their own careers often finance their art with low paying service jobs. The average artist's income is just about \$24,500 in Ontario, despite high levels of education and expertise. Increased support for artists can make a real difference to the livelihoods of some of our lowest paid citizens.

It is also important that the provincial political parties have a clear position on arts – an area often neglected in party platforms. The provincial government can increase its support for artists and arts organizations through the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ministry of Culture.

Ask your candidates:

- Does your party have an arts platform and what is it?
- Does your party have any initiatives to promote arts attendance and accessibility for all?
- Will your party prevent clawbacks to arts funding through the Ontario Arts Council and Ontario Trillium Foundation?

Resources:

The Ontario Arts Council: <http://www.arts.on.ca/index.html>

Oxford Creative Connections: <http://www.oxfordcreativeconnections.com>

Hill Strategies Research Inc. Artists in Canada's Provinces and Territories 2009:

<http://www.hillstrategies.com/content/artists-canada%E2%80%99s-provinces-and-territories>





Do you have a hard time finding quality, affordable child care?

You're not alone.

The Ontario government has recently introduced new supports for families and children with the implementation of full day early learning for 4-5 year olds.

But child care continues to be unaffordable and hard to find for those who need it most

In Oxford, child care fees without a subsidy vary, with some as high as \$51 - this is in contrast to child care in Quebec which costs just \$7 a day. With 10.5% of Oxford families with children living in poverty, access to high-quality, affordable, licensed child care is more important than ever. But without investment in child care by our provincial government, it is likely the disparities in the affordability and quality of child care facilities will only grow. In Ontario, 4 out of 5 children still do not have access to regulated child care spaces. Here's what child care looks like in Oxford right now:

- Oxford has over 780 licensed centre-based child care spaces.
- Of children aged 0-5 years in Oxford County, only 21.4% have access to regulated child care spaces.
- In 2013, 406 children from low-income families had access to subsidized child care.
- There are currently no children on the waiting list for child care subsidies.
- Nearly all child care workers are women, and most of them are underpaid and overworked.

More funding from the Province could limit child care fees for parents, increase staff wages, and create additional facilities to reduce long waitlists. The Province has been increasing the child care budget incrementally over the years, but a long-term, viable plan is needed. For instance, Ontario can follow Quebec's and Manitoba's examples to develop a five-year plan to ensure the child care budget is not prone to underfunding on a yearly basis.

Ask your candidates:

- Will your party support an early learning and child care system that is affordable and accessible to all?
- How will your party improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for child care workers?
- Will your party support a long-term fully funded child care plan?

Resources:

Child Care Resource Unit: <http://www.childcarecanada.org>

Middle Childhood Matters Coalition: <http://www.middlechildhoodmatterstoronto.on.ca>

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care: <http://www.childcareontario.org>

Oxford Community Child Care: <http://www.oxfordccc.ca>





Ontario needs real action on affordable housing



Everyone needs safe, decent and affordable housing. But hundreds of thousands of Ontarian households don't have it. One-third of Ontario tenant households are in core housing need – lacking adequate, appropriate and/or affordable housing. Women, Aboriginal people, racialized groups, immigrants, renters, lone parents, and single adults are most likely to be in core housing need. In Oxford County, there are 1,700 tenant households in core housing need. One in 14 households in Oxford

County do not meet Canadian Mortgage & Housing Corporation standards for adequacy, affordability, and/or suitability.

Private developers can't build new rental housing that is affordable for most low and modest income residents at the profit rate they desire. That's why we need government action.

A long-term affordable housing strategy with dedicated funds to implement it would transform the lives of Ontarians. In 2010, the provincial government launched its long-term affordable housing strategy. While it made some changes to rules surrounding social housing, the plan lacked targets, timelines and most importantly, long-term investment.

The next government needs to introduce a plan of action that addresses:

- The affordability of housing
- The availability of affordable housing
- Supports, programs and protections
- A clear way to measure progress

Ask your candidates:

- What is your party's vision for a long-term affordable housing strategy?
- What investments would your party make to implement a long-term affordable housing strategy?
- What is your party's commitment to reduce the social housing waiting list?

Resources:

Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, *Where's Home? 2013*:

www.onpha.on.ca/onpha/Content/PolicyAndResearch/Wheres_Home/WH2013.aspx

Wellesley Institute: www.wellesleyinstitute.com

The Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca





Ontario's environment: Not yet sustained

The provincial government isn't providing sufficient protection for Ontario's environment and the people who depend on it.

- Ontario has made strides in getting rid of coal power. However, recent discussions around creating more nuclear power indicate it has yet to commit to energy conservation and clean, renewable energy.
- Toxic chemicals find their ways into our environment and bodies creating health problems for people and harming wildlife such as bees that are crucial to our food supply.
- Too many products and packaging end up being thrown out and polluting our environment.

The Ontario government needs to have a plan that supports the environment

The provincial government must do its part to build a better economy that ensures Ontario remains a livable and ecologically healthy province. The Province needs to:

- Reduce pollution and cut congestion by investing in efficient, environmentally-friendly public transit;
- Meet its *Climate Plan 2020* targets to reduce global warming pollution;
- Reduce toxic chemicals and carcinogens to protect Ontarians from exposure to cancer;
- Commit to *Conservation First* mandate and renewable energy to reduce energy costs;
- Stop the decline in pollinators to protect our food supply and ecosystems;
- Adopt a new Waste Diversion Act based on the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility.

Ask your candidates:

- How will you ensure *Climate Plan 2020* targets are met?
- How do you plan to improve public transit and reduce the number of bad air quality days?
- What are you doing to support renewable energy development in the province?
- What is your party doing to get companies to take responsibility for their product and packaging waste?

Resources:

Green Prosperity: www.greenprosperity.ca

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper: www.waterkeeper.ca

Citizens Environmental Alliance: <http://www.citizensenvironmentalliance.org>

Renewable is doable: <http://www.renewableisdoable.com/>

Ontario Greenbelt Alliance: www.greenbeltalliance.ca





Livable and Affordable Housing is ... Vital to Our Health



Livable and affordable housing has a major role to play in our physical and mental well-being. People who are homeless or don't have healthy and affordable housing are at high risk of serious physical and mental health problems, problems accessing health care, ending up in the hospital, being assaulted and going hungry – and die much earlier than people with stable housing. Healthy housing includes housing with supports that allows people with physical and mental health needs to live in dignity.

Without livable and affordable housing, it's hard to get and keep a job, have a harmonious family life, meet our health needs and raise healthy children. Everyone needs healthy housing – decent, stable and appropriate to our individual needs.

... and Makes Good Economic Sense

Creating new affordable housing and rehabilitating our existing housing is good for our economy too. It creates jobs and stimulates our economy when many Ontarians are still struggling. For every \$1 that governments invest in the construction of new affordable housing, a \$1.76 is generated in the local economy. That puts Ontarians back to work, and creates much needed affordable housing that benefits us all. But, it doesn't happen without government investments.

Ask your candidates:

- How will your party ensure that all people with physical and mental health issues have their housing needs met?
- What are your party's plans to ensure access to healthy and affordable housing for all Ontarians?

Resources:

- Mental Health Commission, *At Home/Chez Soi Project*: www.mentalhealthcommission.ca
- Reach³, *Housing Vulnerability and Health: Canada's Hidden Emergency*: www.stmichaelshospital.com/pdf/crich/housing-vulnerability-and-health.pdf
- Wellesley Institute, Affordable Housing research: www.wellesleyinstitute.com/our-work/housing





Investing in newcomers is investing in Ontario's future



Newcomers continue to choose Ontario as their first choice of province to settle in Canada. Immigrants make significant contributions to our economic and social prosperity and account for as much as 47% of Ontario's workforce. Yet, Ontario receives fewer resources to help immigrants compared to other provinces.

Immigrants face many challenges upon arriving to Canada and require the appropriate resources and supports to help them fully adjust and settle in the province. Areas newcomers require assistance includes: English language training, housing, and employment training and skills development.

The Province plays a key role in delivering programs and adopting policies like minimum wage, employment standards and enforcement, social assistance, employment and training, and labour market integration for newcomers. These programs and policies have a strong impact on the lives of many newcomers and should be further strengthened. Unfortunately, the federal government cut nearly \$45 million in settlement funding to Ontario in 2011 forcing many organizations to end programs and services to newcomers. The Province must step in and ensure that immigrants have access to the services they need by filling in the funding gap or lobbying the federal government to restore funding levels.

Ontario's immigrants require better access to the labour market

The recent recession has resulted in substantial job losses throughout the province. During such economic downturns, newly arrived immigrants are the first to lose out on employment. Many immigrants already face barriers in accessing the labour market due to discrimination, lack of Canadian work experience, or unrecognized education credentials from their home country. This has resulted in many newcomers living in poverty.

The Province needs to increase investments in successful employment programs, such as paid internships or bridging programs to help internationally trained professionals receive the opportunities they deserve.

Ask your candidates:

- Will your party lobby to restore federal cuts to Ontario settlement services?
- How will your party work to reduce poverty among recent immigrants in Ontario?
- What strategies will your party use to help internationally trained professionals find employment that matches their skills?

Resources:

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants: www.ocasi.org

Settlement.org: www.settlement.org

Welcome to Oxford: www.welcometooxford.ca





Working more for less



Many workers in Ontario are finding it difficult to find good jobs that provide a decent livable income. Jobs have increasingly become precarious, that is, more insecure, part-time and temporary, offering low wages and little to no benefits. The lack of stable and decent employment results in many workers and their families having to live in poverty, struggling to make ends meet. They are forced to increase personal debt to pay bills, live in substandard housing and rely on food banks. This contributes to poor health, increased stress and family breakdown.

- Over the last 20 years, precarious employment has increased by about 50%. The most precarious workers earn 46% less than those with secure employment.
- Between 2004 and 2012, the number of minimum wage workers aged 35 years and over has increased by 10 percentage points, from 17% to 27%.
- Newcomers and immigrants, along with recent graduates, are more likely to be in precarious employment. They are also finding it hard to find jobs that match their skill level and education, and are forced to work in entry-level jobs for which they are over-qualified.

The Province must step up to reduce youth unemployment

The province's youth unemployment rate is twice the national average, fluctuating between 16% and 17%. Because youth find it difficult to enter the labour force, they tend to engage in precarious forms of employment. Over 50% of youth are in part-time employment, compared to 14% of workers aged 25 or older. Further, youth fall victim of unpaid internships that take advantage of their need to gain work experience.

Ontario needs to re-introduce Employment Equity legislation

Ontario's outdated employment standards legislation and lack of proper enforcement are resulting in many employers taking advantage of workers. Many workers are not paid full wages or are charged fees to get a job. In addition, discrimination creates employment inequalities for people of colour who continue to be paid less – \$30,385 on average compared to \$37,332 for non-racialized groups, and have higher rates of unemployment – 8.6% compared to 6.2% for non-racialized groups as of 2005.

Ask your candidates:

- What will your party do to bring back good, decent paying full-time jobs to Ontario?
- Will your party bring back Employment Equity legislation to the province?
- How will your party address youth unemployment?

Resources:

Good Jobs for All Coalition: www.goodjobsforall.ca

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: www.policyalternatives.ca

Law Commission of Ontario: www.lco-cdo.org

Minimum Wage Campaign: www.raisetheminimumwage.ca





Migrant workers deserve fair and equal treatment



Migrant workers make important contributions to Canada and Ontario's economy, performing a wide variety of jobs in various industries, from working on farms, to caring for children and the elderly, to working in offices, restaurants, and hotels. Ontario receives the highest number of migrant workers than any other province, with nearly 120,000 workers present in 2012. Despite their critical contributions, migrant workers in 'low-skill' jobs (many of whom are workers of colour from low-income households) have difficulty in gaining access to permanent residency in Canada and the rights, benefits and protections that come with full immigration status. Ontario laws in particular exclude migrant workers from services and protections.

- **Exploitation:** Migrant workers are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation from unscrupulous bosses and recruiters due to their temporary immigration status and work permits being tied to a single employer. Workers are often fearful of speaking out against workplace violations or refusing to perform unsafe work, as this may jeopardize their chances of getting work permits renewed or face deportation if they are fired from their job.
- **Exclusion:** Under current Ontario laws many migrant workers are excluded from basic rights and protections such as minimum wage laws, occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, and provincial health care coverage.
- **Fees:** Many migrant workers are also forced to pay thousands of dollars in fees to recruitment agencies in order to work in Ontario, leaving workers and families in considerable debt. Ontario has yet to regulate recruiters.

Advocates have been demanding that Ontario take immediate and meaningful action to improve the working and living conditions for migrant workers and ensure that migrant workers have the same basic rights and protections as citizens. Many of the jobs that migrant workers perform are by no means temporary, and they have been traditionally performed by immigrants who previously had access to permanent immigration status. All workers should receive full status upon arrival and have the right to bring their family members to Ontario to settle permanently.

Ask your candidates:

- What actions will you take to ensure all workers in Ontario have access to basic labour rights and protections?
- What steps will your party take to eliminate recruitment fees paid by migrant workers coming to work in Ontario?
- What will your party do to create provincial and federal access to permanent residency for migrant workers?

Resources:

Migrant Workers Alliance for Change: www.migrantworkersalliance.org

Justice for Migrant Workers: www.justicia4migrantworkers.org

Workers' Action Centre: www.workersactioncentre.org





Ontario's low-wage workers deserve a raise



Since 2013, community organizations and advocates have been pressuring the provincial government to raise the minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$14 an hour in order to help lift low-income workers and their families out of poverty.

In January 2014, the Ontario government announced that it will raise the minimum wage to \$11 in June 2014 and introduce legislation that will see the minimum wage increased annually by the rate of inflation. While an important victory, \$11 still falls 16% below the poverty line, leaving many low-wage workers struggling to make ends meet. Unfortunately, the government was defeated before the legislation could be passed to index the minimum wage to inflation.

Low-wage jobs on the rise

The number of workers in minimum wage jobs has more than doubled between 2003 and 2011, representing nearly 10% of Ontario's workforce. Minimum wage jobs are no longer being performed solely by young workers in small businesses. Increasingly, it is women, workers over 25 years of age, workers of colour, and new immigrants who are making up a greater share of the minimum wage workforce. Further, nearly half of all minimum wage workers in Ontario are employed in large businesses that employ 500 or more employees. These are usually large corporations that make millions of dollars in profits by paying their workers poverty-level wages.

Boosting the minimum wage to \$14 also makes good economic sense. Low-income workers, for example, are most likely to spend the money they earn on goods and services in the local community. This stimulates production and demand. It has been estimated that increasing the minimum wage to \$14 an hour would inject an extra \$5 billion into the economy and workers' pockets. A decent minimum wage also promotes healthy communities, as workers and their families would have greater access to healthy food, medicine, healthcare services, and recreational activities.

Ask your candidates:

- What will your party do to ensure that low wage workers are not forced to live in poverty?
- What will your party do to curb the growing number of low-wage jobs in Ontario?
- What will you do to ensure that highly profitable corporations are paying their employees a decent wage?

Resources:

The Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage: www.raisetheminimumwage.ca

Workers' Action Centre: www.workersactioncentre.org

The Wellesley Institute: www.wellesleyinstitute.com





Do you or your children dream of going to college or university?

In order to compete successfully in the global market, it has become more important for young people in Canada to obtain a higher level of education. Over 70% of new jobs require it. But, for many high school graduates, going to college or university is just a dream. Why?

Higher education has continuously been underfunded by the Province

- Massive cuts to federal transfer payments have resulted in colleges and universities hiking up their tuition fees to make up for lost revenue.
- Though it is up to the Province to step in to relieve the burden on students, recent investments have only provided emergency funds to a continuously underfunded sector.
- Ontario has the lowest per-student funding and the highest tuition fees in the country.

The cost of post-secondary education keeps climbing

- Tuition fees in Ontario have tripled since 1990. Ontario students, who make up 38% of undergraduates in Canada, pay the highest tuition fees in Canada, on average \$7,259 a year.
- Over 70% of high school graduates who didn't go to college or university said that the high cost of tuition was the reason. When youth miss out on employment opportunities in their early 20's, their chances of remaining low income earners increases.

Huge debt loads are bankrupting a generation

- Student debt has skyrocketed over the years, with the average undergraduate student debt being \$37,000. A \$37,000 loan paid back over 10 years could translate to one owing as much as \$49,500.
- The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), which provides financial assistance to full-time students during their studies, puts a huge debt burden on students.
- Upon graduation, students are given a grace period of 6 months before accumulating interest on their debt. As a result of the government's emphasis on repayable loans through OSAP rather than non-repayable needs-based grants, many students cannot help but rack up mortgage-sized debt loads.
- This debt penalizes lower-income people and those entering a job market when prospects of securing well paid, entry-level positions upon graduation are few. These graduates spend decades working to pay it off.

Ask your candidates:

- How will your party help students avoid getting into deep debt from pursuing higher education?
- Will your party take action to reduce student debt loads?
- Will your party advocate for more government investment in post-secondary education to help stop tuition fee increases and steep expenses for students?

Resources:

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: www.policyalternatives.ca

Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario: www.cfsontario.ca

Canadian Association of University Teachers: www.caut.ca





Are Ontario's public schools adequately funded?

The public education system in Ontario is funded by the provincial Ministry of Education, as well as through local property taxes. Since 1998, provincial funding has been inadequate to cover the full cost of the public education system. For instance, most school boards spend more on special education than they receive from the Province to fund it. While the Province provides schools boards with funds through the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) intended to assist students facing socio-economic challenges, a large portion of the money is instead being used to cover underfunded operating costs. In addition, schools are increasingly reliant on fees and fundraising to fill budget holes. This reliance on private money creates a divide in educational opportunities for students attending schools in wealthier areas compared to lower-income areas.



The Province's role in education funding

The Province is responsible for funding public education, but funding is not adequate to cover the basic costs, including full-day kindergarten, maintenance, staff costs, and the costs of learning materials. Increased funding from the Province is necessary to cover rising costs and to ensure that all children in Ontario have access to quality education, regardless of their family's income.

Ask your candidates:

- How will your party ensure that public education is adequately funded?
- What will your party do to reduce the inequities that arise when private money is allowed to enter the public education system?
- How will your party ensure that the Learning Opportunities Grant is spent on students facing socio-economic challenges, as it was intended?

Resources:

Campaign for Public Education: www.campaignforpubliceducation.ca

People for Education: Annual Report 2013: www.peopleforeducation.ca

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Hugh Mackenzie – No Time for Complacency. 2009: www.policyalternatives.ca





Shouldn't public space be available for community use?



There is a shortage of welcoming, accessible, and affordable spaces for community members to gather throughout Ontario. Public spaces like schools, community recreation centres, and parks serve as community hubs. Community groups rely on these spaces, but their access is decreasing as fees rise and facilities are closed. Community members face barriers accessing public space due to increasing costs, limited space, age, and/or language ability, limiting both recreational opportunities and those for community engagement. With rural school closures, many Oxford residents lack sufficient community spaces.

The Province's role in providing space for community use

In 2004, the Ontario government recognized the importance of community use of school spaces. It provided school boards with funding under the *Community Use of Schools* (CUS) program to open schools to communities and make space more affordable. By 2012, funding for this program was projected to be \$66 million. However, its investment has flat lined at \$48 million for the past three years, resulting in an increase in fees charged to the community to access space. More investment is needed to achieve the promised amount of \$66 million.

The provincial government also created the *Priority School Initiative* to offer free space for community use in 500 schools in high-need neighbourhoods across Ontario. Again, this program currently falls well short of the promise and is offered in only 220 schools. The Province also committed to providing community hubs as part of its *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. By creating community hubs and other spaces to provide safe places for the community to gather and play, the provincial government would help ensure that people remain active and engaged in their communities. We look forward to them delivering on this commitment.

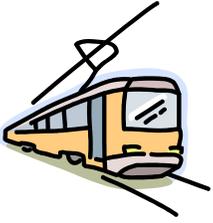
Ask your candidates:

- How will your party encourage the development of community hubs?
- How will your party address the systemic underfunding of community space and the increasing fees charged to the public for accessing these spaces?
- Youth often experience difficulties accessing community space. What will your party do to ensure that youth have access to community space?

Resources:

SPACE Coalition, Public Space for Public Use: A Review of Community Access to School and Municipal Facilities in Ontario, Nov 2013: www.spacecoalition.ca
Ministry of Education Community Use of Schools: www.edu.gov.on.ca





Public transit is an important service for all of us

Affordable, accessible public transit allows us to get from A to B and connect with our communities. It contributes to local economies, and it is good for the environment. But, chronic lack of investment has contributed to almost non-existent public transit in rural areas, which hurts those with low incomes the most.

Province needs to pay its fair share for transit operations

In most communities in Oxford County, public transit is not available. Without affordable, accessible transportation, community members struggle to meet even their most basic needs – grocery shopping, getting to and from work, and accessing appropriate and timely health care. Rural and small municipalities struggle to afford public transportation, and the social service sector is devoting staff time, expertise, and agency dollars that are continually decreasing, so that the people they serve can access the appropriate care. The province needs to step up and help rural residents access safe, affordable public transit.

Rural public transit – there's a lot on the line

There's not much agreement when it comes to how to pay for public transit in rural areas. It's a tough call. But politicians need to stop evading the question and find the most fair and equitable way to cover the cost. Let's take high user fares off the table right now. Communities need affordable options.

Some have raised the issue of privatization in transit services. But privatization in other areas has led to cancelled routes, increased costs, and disputes with private operators. It raises serious concerns like transit access, affordability, safety, maintenance, and accountability.

Ask your candidates:

- How will your party invest in transportation in rural Ontario?
- How will your party ensure fair and equitable methods for funding transit across the province?
- Will your party ensure that the transit system remains publicly operated and maintained?
- What is your party's position on public-private partnerships for transit infrastructure?

Resources:

Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Transit: <http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/transit-and-transportation.htm>

Ontario Public Transit Association: <http://www.octa.on.ca>

Rural Public Transit Library by The Rural Overland Utility Transit: <http://catchthetrout.ca/library-rural-public-transit/>

Oxford Transportation Strategy: <http://www.spcoxford.ca/oxford-transportation-strategy>





Ontario needs to bring positive change to social assistance

Ontario has two social assistance programs: Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The loss of good jobs and the failure of other programs to carry their weight, like Employment Insurance and WSIB, mean more Ontarians are forced to turn to these programs for support. But OW and ODSP do not provide enough income for recipients to meet their basic needs, let alone the rising cost of living, and fail to help them get out of poverty. Both programs are “last resort” programs that take a punitive approach to income supports and financial eligibility, which is counterproductive to reducing poverty. The Ontario government has made some improvements to OW and ODSP.



But we’ve still got a long way to go ... people on social assistance continue to live in deep poverty and struggle with inadequate income support.

Ontario needs to bring positive change to help OW and ODSP recipients move out of poverty by:

- Increasing the incomes of people receiving OW and ODSP to a level that allows them to pay for housing, food, clothing, a phone, transportation, and other regular necessities
- Making sure people with disabilities have enough income to pay for their longer-term and disability-related needs
- Ending dollar-for-dollar deductions of child support payments from the benefits of lone parents
- Ending the practice of reducing social assistance benefits as the Ontario Child Benefit increases
- Giving municipalities sufficient funds for housing supports and homeless prevention to make up for the Province’s elimination of the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit
- Providing drug and dental benefits to all low income Ontarians, both children and adults, whether they are working or not

Ask your candidates:

- What actions will your party take to bring positive change to OW and ODSP in Ontario and ensure quality, accessible programs that help people out of poverty?
- Will your party commit to making sure that people on OW and ODSP have incomes that are adequate to support the cost of living?

Resources:

Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC): www.incomesecurity.org

ODSP Action Coalition: www.odspaction.ca

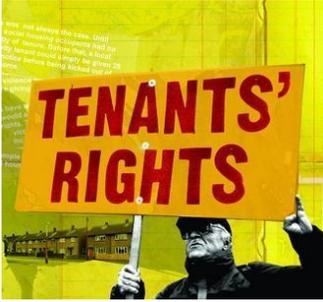
Colour of Poverty Campaign: www.colourofpoverty.ca

ISAC’s Social Assistance Review website: www.sareview.ca





We need a strong voice for tenants at Queen's Park



In Oxford County, 24% of dwellings are rentals. The long wait list for social housing - over 1,200 households and counting - are testament to the critical lack of affordable housing. Over the past five years, the cost of rent has increased by 7%. The average rent in Woodstock is \$881, the third-highest in western Ontario. This spring, Woodstock had a critically low vacancy rate of 1.8%. A balanced acceptable rate for a community is 3%.

In Oxford County, utility costs are a significant concern, including those in social housing. For those living in non-social housing units, utility costs can force tenants into arrears and eventually eviction. Relief for low income tenants in this area and making units more energy-efficient would lead to more stable housing.

The provincial *Residential Tenancies Act* allows private landlords in Ontario to set rents at whatever amount they want for vacant rental units and all units in buildings built after November 1, 1991. It's a two-tiered system that's not fair for tenants, and a recipe for sky-high rents. Additionally, for residences that offer room and board rates, the board portion of cost is not controlled. This means that the landlord can raise the board portion by any amount as long as proper notice is given.

The provincial government should treat social housing providers fairly when paying social assistance benefits. Presently, the Province provides a higher shelter allowance for social assistance recipients living in private market housing than in social housing. Oxford County considers this lost rental income. Social housing tenants are paying the price. It's time to fix the rules.

Ask your candidates:

- Will your party introduce rent controls for vacant units and rentals built after November 1, 1991?
- Will your party fix the social assistance rules to ensure that social housing providers are treated the same as private market landlords?
- How will your party ensure that social housing tenants are receiving the appropriate supports?

Resources:

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario: www.acto.ca

Elgin-Oxford Legal Clinic: www.eolc.ca

