



**Office for Systemic Justice**  
Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada

**2024 Ontario Pre-budget Submission**

**About the Office for Systemic Justice:**

The Office for Systemic Justice gives public voice to the social, economic, and environmental concerns of hundreds of Sisters and Associates of the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph of Canada, the majority of whom are based in Ontario. Rooted in a long history of engagement in health care, including the administration of hospitals and long-term care facilities, as well as education, affordable housing, outreach to people living in poverty, care of land and water, and biodiversity protection, we submit the following recommendations to Ontario's pre-budget consultant action:

**What We Recommend:**

Many Food Banks in Ontario are on the verge of collapse due to the overwhelming numbers of people needing to access a food bank. At the same time, we know that food banks only see the tip of the iceberg since most people experiencing food insecurity don't access food banks.

1. A big part of the problem is the totally inadequate level of social assistance. We join United Way Elgin Middlesex in urging the government to include allocations in the 2024-2025 budget that:

- Double Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates to bring people's income above the official poverty line; and
- Index both OW and ODSP rates to inflation.

2. Being a worker in Ontario is no guarantee that one won't live in poverty. Over the past three decades, Ontario has seen a progressive growth in precarious work (part-time, low-

wage, poor working conditions, few benefits). The significant difference between minimum wage (\$15.50) and Ontario's average living wage (\$19.72) goes a long way toward explaining the increase in the number of workers in Ontario who need to access a food bank. (The rate for a living wage varies from region to region, but no matter where you are in Ontario, the living wage is higher than minimum wage).

- Implement quick and regular increases to the minimum wage until it reaches the same level as the average living wage, and index to inflation.
- Reduce the precarity of the labour market through improvements to labour laws. For example, classify gig workers as employees so they receive basic labour protections.
- Restore legislation to ensure that temp workers doing the same job as full-time workers are paid the same.

### 3. Affordable Housing

While there is a shortage of affordable housing generally in Ontario, the bigger issue is the huge deficit in deeply affordable housing. The market alone will never meet the need for deeply affordable housing; meaningful government intervention is necessary.

- Directly build or incentivize the construction of deeply affordable housing units.
- Implement a capital repair program to protect Ontario's existing stock of community housing homes.
- Expand rental assistance and enhance other income support programs, such as the Canada - Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) to keep people housed and prevent homelessness.
- Address Indigenous housing and homelessness challenges by establishing regional, Indigenous-led entities to develop strategies, programs, and supports as well as deliver funding from provincial government. These entities, strategies and programs should be implemented by Indigenous leaders and diverse Indigenous communities.

### 4. Health care

Ontario's healthcare system is in crisis. Poor working conditions and underfunding throughout the system are threatening the wellbeing of health workers and patients alike. In 2022, the independent Financial Accountability Office reported that health spending per person in Ontario was \$4,800 in 2020, the lowest in Canada and \$536 (10 per cent) below the average of the other provinces. The privatization of services to for-profit clinics further weakens the system by pulling more money out of the system.

- Increase funding to health care. In 2022, the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) revealed that hospital capacity will considerably diminish by 2027-2028 due to surging demand and the fact that the province is allocating over \$21 billion less to the sector. This money needs to be restored and indeed significantly increased to meet the needs of the system.
- Support the existing workforce by increasing staffing to reduce workloads, providing mental health supports, and making investments to create a safer hospital workplace.
- Increase wages to attract and retain staff.

## 5. Long-term care

Waitlists in long-term care have been growing for years. Thousands of forgotten seniors experience declining health at home or in underfunded assisted living buildings. Investments in the level of care have not come close to matching the level of inflation of the last few years.

- Increase all envelopes in the Level of Care funding.
- Fully fund the new requirements of the Fixing Long- Term Care Act, 2021, through the creation of a FLTCA Compliance Fund.
- Increase funding and capacity for Assisted Living in Seniors' Supportive Housing, supported by increased base and capital funding.
- Stabilize long-term care by committing to predictable, consistent, and multi-year funding.

## 6. Disability Supports

People with disabilities face many challenges when accessing existing government programs, benefits, and services. To build a more equitable and inclusive Ontario:

- Prioritize the shift from institutional to community settings by adding more hours of community support services and investing in supportive housing programs.
- Enhance the financial security of people with disabilities by partnering with the federal government to ensure Ontarians can access all potential gains from the upcoming Canada Disability Benefit.
- Eliminate the wage gap between community support services workers and their long-term care counterparts.

## 7. Protection of Greenbelt and Wetlands

One effective way for the government to address climate change is to invest the protection of the Greenbelt and Ontario's Wetlands.

- Allocate more funding for the acquisition and restoration of natural infrastructure in Ontario's Greenbelt. This measure can support farmers interested in restoring wetlands, forests, and grasslands, all of which are critical to species at risk.
- Cancel the funding allocated for highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass. Instead, examine alternatives such as toll subsidies for the underutilized highway 407.

The budget choices made by the government will shape the quality of our communities for years to come. We urge you to invest in the people, land, and water of Ontario, and to do so in ways that create greater equity while protecting the wellbeing of the environment.