



Ontario Budget 2023: YWCA Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

February 9, 2023

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 focusing on housing, employment, child care, and gender-based violence, as well as services designed to address the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people and their families. We also work to advance substantive gender and racial equity in our province.

Many of our clients and community members are survivors of violence, households impacted by poverty, individuals with disabilities and mental health issues, newcomers to Canada, and women on social assistance looking to re/enter the labour market.

What we are seeing on the frontlines is that poverty, gender-based violence, mental health crises and general hardship continue to deepen. There are not enough Violence Against Women (VAW) and homeless shelter beds to meet demand, nor is there an adequate supply of affordable, supportive housing. The pandemic and rising inflation have made life more difficult for our program participants – and for us to deliver essential services.

This year, we once again call on the government to institute meaningful change for women, families, and gender-diverse people who are facing unequivocal hardship.

To support an equitable, gender-responsive 2023 budget, the YWCA Ontario Coalition recommends the Province:

1. Repair the Canada-Ontario Child Care Plan

We join the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and advocates from across the province in calling for robust investment in a high-quality and accessible child care system in Ontario – one that is driven by the nonprofit sector and values the work of child care workers.

The Provincial Wage Enhancement (PWE) Grant, to which all child care providers are required to apply, is inequitable. Currently, the PWE only allows for the wages of some staff to be improved and is not permanent.

Over the last few years, the child care sector has experienced increased demands which first materialized due to the pandemic and, since then, the significant transformation through the introduction of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) System. Child care providers are navigating administrative complexities related to the implementation of CWELCC and pandemic-related challenges. A new funding model that responds to these administrative complexities is needed.

Moreover, as stated in a [recent letter to Minister Stephen Lecce](#), we are gravely concerned about the August 2022 revisions to the federal child care agreement, which removed controls on undue profits, as well as the requirements for financial audits. These are two critical pieces that ensure accountability and the responsible use of public dollars. Removing cost control and accountability measures from the Canada-Ontario child care plan allows for-profit operators to gain from public dollars and puts the sustainability of the plan at risk.

We call on the Ontario Government to reinstate the cost control and financial accountability measures that were first set out in the child care plan, in addition to instituting:

- A real salary scale starting at \$25 per hour for all child care workers and \$30 per hour for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs);
- Benefits and pensions;
- Paid sick days;
- Professional development time;
- Paid programming time;¹
- A new funding model that responds to the administrative complexities related to the implementation of CWELCC and pandemic-related challenges; and,
- Immediate support for nonprofit child care centres that are currently operating at a deficit to ensure these spots do not close permanently.

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

The pandemic showed everyone how critical the social service sector is to the economic health of our province. Now, workers are facing soaring rates of inflation, increasing housing costs and stagnating

wages. Decent work conditions are crucial in ensuring that Ontarians are able to pay rent, feed their families and contribute to the economy. Ontario needs comprehensive government action to improve employment and labour standards, particularly for the care economy and other feminized industries.

We call on the Province to ensure decent work conditions by:

- Revising employment standards legislation to introduce 10 permanent paid sick days, plus an additional 14 during public health emergencies; a minimum wage of at least \$20 per hour; and ensure all workers in the province have access to minimum employment standards.
- Dropping the Bill 124 appeal which disproportionately impacts women-concentrated fields that support women, girls and gender diverse people, such as transitional housing and shelter employees, child care workers and nurses – the very fields that bore the brunt of the pandemic.
- Taking meaningful action to eliminate the gender and racial wage gap.

3. Address the housing crisis

Currently, there are 735,000 Ontarians in need of core housing² and 215,000 on social housing waiting lists. While the government has introduced legislation (Bill 23 and Bill 3) to build more affordable housing, neither piece of legislation guarantees any affordable housing will materialize.

We are also deeply concerned that Bill 23 will stall the creation of affordable housing by reducing developer fees to municipalities. The bill eliminates charges that developers currently pay toward housing. This removes hundreds of millions of dollars that municipalities rely on for housing programs, and dramatically reduces municipal affordable housing efforts.³ Municipalities need more sources of revenue to meet our housing needs, not fewer.

To address the housing crisis in Ontario, we recommend the following:

- As suggested by the Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario, invest in creating 30,000 new supportive housing units over the next 10 years to meet the needs of individuals living with mental health issues.⁴
- Invest in a range of supportive housing for specific communities of women including Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, senior women, women with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- Invest in culturally-responsive housing supports to ensure women, particularly survivors of violence, and women with experiences of chronic homelessness, institutionalization and substance use, can maintain housing.
- 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 VAW shelters and transitional housing to address funding shortfalls resulting from chronic underfunding of these vital services.⁵

4. Support the nonprofit sector and address the human resources crisis

Frontline staff in care sectors are rapidly burning out and have not received a wage increase in several years. These are the individuals who have worked full-time throughout the pandemic to support essential services. Funding for our sector has not kept up with inflation, and Bill 124 prevents us from raising wages. Further, many frontline jobs are performed by racialized women. It is essential the Province demonstrates its commitment to gender and racial equity by improving wages.

We echo the calls of the Ontario Nonprofit Network:⁶

- Enable a whole-of-government approach for Ontario’s 58,000 nonprofits and charities by creating a “home in government” for the sector.
- Ensure Ontarians have high-quality services by building a resilient nonprofit workforce.
- Leverage existing resources, including public infrastructure and procurement dollars, to multiply economic and social benefits in local communities.
- Remove barriers for nonprofits to build critical infrastructure including affordable housing, child care centres, long-term care homes, and other community amenities.
- Ensure non-profit funding keeps up with inflation to safeguard the essential programs and services we offer our communities.

3. Enhance social assistance rates

The last provincial budget provided an increase of five percent to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates – which is not nearly enough to address the hardship experienced by people living with disabilities. Ontario Works rates also remain inadequate. Across the province, women find themselves trapped in our shelter system, and are forced to couch-surf or go unhoused because there simply is nowhere affordable to go. Social assistance rates do not cover the cost of market rent.

We ask that your government take action to address woefully low social assistance rates by:

- Immediately doubling ODSP and OW rates and index OW rates to inflation by reinvesting the over one billion dollars in saved social assistance costs during the pandemic; increasing the OW earnings exemption to match ODSP.⁷
- Address the breakdowns and backlog of cases and practices of dismissals at the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTO) so everyone has access to a fair and speedy hearing.⁸
- Ensure women and all people with precarious immigration status have access to income support measures and an expedited path to permanent residency.

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

Gender inequities persist in Ontario’s labour market across many industries and sectors, particularly in the skilled trades. With skilled tradespeople in severely short supply across Ontario, it is imperative to recruit more women into these roles and ensure that women have the skills they need to enter and excel in lucrative, traditionally male-dominated fields such as data science and advanced manufacturing. Current gender-specific employment programs simply cannot evolve and strengthen without sustainable, multi-year funding.

To ensure women are able 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 organizations.
- Modify Employment Ontario to include women as a priority category in order to ensure clear gender targets in funding allocations.
- 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.

5. Dedicate funding for girls’ programming

An investment in girls and youth is an investment in Ontario’s future. However, meaningful government funding for girls’ programs continues to be nonexistent at any order of government. 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. The financial responsibility of ensuring these spaces and programs cannot continue to fall solely on the nonprofit sector.

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 ensure we can provide responsive and supportive programming.
- 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)

In 2022, the Federal Government announced the first-ever national action plan to address GBV in Canada. The action plan comes after decades of advocacy from women’s organizations, survivors and feminists who have recognized the need for a coordinated and equitable plan to address GBV. The province has a critical role to play in ensuring the proposed National Action Plan will meaningfully

address the GBV crisis.

To meaningfully address gender-based violence we recommend:

- Ensuring that investments from the National Action Plan prioritize existing core services (operating) over innovation (projects) and all investments have a measurable plan and strategy.⁹
- Ensuring 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.
- Creating and implementing a coordinated province-wide strategy to eliminate gender-based violence.

In closing, we offer our assistance as civil society partners across Ontario to move forward with urgently needed budget investments. Our province is already in crisis; waiting for the crisis to deepen before taking action is irresponsible and will only further marginalize communities who need our support the most. Our commitment to fostering a province wherein women, girls and gender diverse people can not only survive, but thrive, is unwavering.

We are ready to work with you to make a more equitable province when you are.

Sincerely,

YWCA Cambridge

YWCA Hamilton

YWCA Kitchener Waterloo

YWCA Muskoka

YWCA Niagara Region

YWCA Peterborough Haliburton

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

YWCA Sudbury

YWCA Toronto

Sources

¹ https://www.childcareontario.org/worth_more

² 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.

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<https://www.ywcatoronto.org/Assets/YWCA/Documents/Advocacy/Media/Bill%2023%20Joint%20Letter%20to%20Government%20Signed.pdf>

⁴ https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CMHAOn_Housing_First_2020_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Refer to Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) 2023 Pre-Budget Submission.

⁶ <https://theonnc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ONN-2023-Pre-Budget-Submission.pdf>

⁷ <https://incomesecurity.org/presentation-to-the-parliamentary-assistant-to-the-minister-of-finance-in-advance-of-the-2023-ontario-budget/>

⁸ <https://incomesecurity.org/presentation-to-the-parliamentary-assistant-to-the-minister-of-finance-in-advance-of-the-2023-ontario-budget/>

⁹ Refer to Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) 2023 Pre-Budget Submission.