



The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
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Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy,

YWCA Ontario is a provincial coalition of YWCA Member Associations that serves more than 50,000 people each year across Ontario. We offer a range of housing, employment, child care and violence against women programs and 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.

We remain deeply concerned about the communities we serve and the disparate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on low-income individuals and families, particularly women who are precariously housed and survivors of gender-based violence.

Last year, we called on the government to support an equitable, gender-responsive 2021 budget. This year, we are once again calling on the government to institute meaningful change for women and families who are facing unequivocal hardships during the pandemic.

To support an equitable, gender-responsive 2022 budget, the YWCA Ontario Coalition recommends the Province:

1. Sign the federal child care agreement

- Invest in a publicly funded, universal and accessible child care system by signing a federal child care agreement that will lower child care fees, enhance funding for operators and increase wages for child care workers.
- Address the shortage of early childhood educators and improve the long-term affordability and accessibility of child care.
- Ensure federal child care dollars support a public and non-profit-driven expansion of child care services that offer a range of flexible models for quality early learning.
- Prioritize immediate support for non-profit child care centres that are currently operating at a deficit to ensure these spots do not permanently close.
- Ensure an adequate, safe and affordable supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing equipment, and priority status for testing and contact tracing for all child care workers.

2. Institute a \$4 per hour salary enhancement for front-line workers

- Reinstatement the \$4 per hour salary increase that ended in August 2021 for front-line workers and expand the top-up to include child care, emergency shelter and supportive housing workers.
- Many front-line jobs are performed by racialized women. It is important the Province demonstrates its commitment to gender and racial equity by improving wages.

3. Enhance social assistance rates

- Accept the federal government's assessment that a minimum of \$2000/month is needed for individuals to make ends meet, and invest in increases to Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program until monthly benefits reflect this minimum standard, ensuring that people living with disabilities have access to additional support.
- Increase the Ontario Child Benefit and remove all immigration status-based barriers preventing access to provincial child benefits, and all other income supports.
- Address the breakdowns and backlogs in the Social Benefits Tribunal so everyone has access to a fair and expedient hearing.

4. Invest \$75 million in COVID-related upskilling for women workers

- Recognize women as a specialized demographic within the transformation framework of the Employment Ontario program.
- Invest \$75 million in new money towards women's upskilling programs for women impacted by COVID-19 and to support low-income women's access to the labour market. Invest in multi-year, women-specific training programs provided by women-centred non-profits.
- Include clear gender targets in funding allocations in skilled trades and development.

5. Prioritize housing investments and rent relief provisions

- Deploy as much as possible of the \$1.4 billion funding for rent payment support under the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit and double Ontario's contribution of \$700 million.
- Immediately deploy Ontario's share of federal funding under the \$1 billion Rapid Housing Initiative to acquire, develop and maintain affordable housing and match that with Ontario's own contribution of \$400 million.
- Provide additional funds to support the provision of wrap-around services for those housed through the Rapid Housing Initiative.
- As recommended 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.
- Invest in portable rent relief measures that are easy to access by tenants and can help maintain and stabilize housing during this time of crisis.

6. Repeal Bill 124

- Commit to using global funding budgets to manage costs rather than wage controls that constrain provincially funded non-profits in our ability to attract and retain talent, as recommended by the [Ontario Nonprofit Network](#).
- Ensure provincial funding agreements reflect business costs, including administrative expenses, digital infrastructure costs, pay equity maintenance and PPE.
- Revise employment standards legislation to introduce 10 permanent paid sick days, a minimum wage that reflects a living wage, and ensures all workers in the province have access to minimum employment standards.

7. Dedicate funding for girls' programming

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

8. Address gender-based violence

- Stabilize funding for Violence Against Women shelters and supporting programs through an additional \$30-million investment to the core operating budgets.
- Create and implement a coordinated province-wide strategy to eliminate gender-based violence.

9. Invest in a sector stabilization fund for non-profits

- Provide stabilization funding for nonprofits to withstand the significant disruptions to our revenue and operations to ensure we can continue to serve our communities and local economies throughout the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, as recommended by the Ontario Nonprofit Network.
- Enhance funding to support necessary infrastructure costs to continue providing responsive essential services and cover additional COVID-19-related costs such as PPE, additional paid sick days and equitable workplace accommodations for employees.

In closing, we offer our assistance as civil society partners across the province to move forward with urgently needed budget investments to safeguard the rights and well-being of countless community members. We remain deeply committed to building a better future for women, girls and gender diverse people.

Sincerely,

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