

***This letter was sent to Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario, Steven Del Duca, leader Ontario Liberal Party, Mike Schreiner, Leader Ontario Green Party, and Andrea Horwarth, Leader Ontario New Democratic Party***



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

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Dear ,

[mcco.ca](http://mcco.ca)

We are writing to offer encouragement and seek information on how your government plans to address three critical issues: **affordable housing**, and poverty reduction through **paid work** and **income security**.

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCCO) has several programs working with people who have experienced homelessness, mental health issues and disabilities. Our program participants face challenges finding affordable housing and securing enough income to pay rent and put food on the table. We know these struggles are not unique to our program participants but are experienced by many people throughout Ontario.

### [Affordable housing and homelessness](#)

Many MCCO program participants live in rental housing and struggle to make ends meet. This is due to rising rental costs and low incomes that are not adjusted to cover these rising costs. They express dismay that much talk of affordable housing seems to focus on homeownership when there is a need for more affordable rental housing.

A recent report from the Financial Accountability Office (*Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario*) reveals the extent of the affordable housing crisis in Ontario and the genuine challenges in the years ahead.

Between 2011 and 2018, the number of households in core housing need grew from 616,900 to 735,000, an increase of 118,100 households, or 19.1 per cent. (FAO, *Housing and Homelessness Programs in Ontario*, p. 2)

Given the increase in Ontario households in core housing need there is no surprise to see a high number of people experiencing homelessness in Ontario (FAO, p.29).

Despite federal and provincial funding commitments through the National Housing Strategy, the FAO forecasts that core housing need will continue to grow and the province will miss its target to end chronic homelessness in Ontario by 2025.

The FAO estimates that the total number of households in core housing need will increase to 815,500 households in 2027, an increase of 80,500 households from 2018. (FAO p. 2)

The FAO concluded that it is unlikely that the Province will achieve its goal of ending chronic homelessness in Ontario by 2025 without new policy measures... (FAO p. 4)

Current levels of support for housing and homelessness programs will still result in even more core housing need and homelessness.

**What will your government do to substantially reduce the number of Ontario households experiencing core housing, particularly households who are renters?**

**What new measures would you implement to end chronic homelessness?**

### **Paid work as a path to Poverty Reduction**

We note that a cornerstone of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy is to help more people find paid work. A current reality is that many people who are working do not earn enough to reach the official poverty line. This means that many Ontarians find themselves in core housing need and facing food insecurity. Those who work at or near the minimum wage cannot afford high rents or the increasing prices for food and other essentials.

For example, if you live in Waterloo Region working for the future minimum wage of \$15.00 and manage to get 35 hours of work a week for an entire year, you would earn \$27,300. Average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$1,076 a month or \$12,912 a year, not including the cost of utilities. That would be nearly 47% of your earned income. Even in markets with lower average rents, such as St. Catharines (\$958), Sudbury (\$912) or Windsor (\$896), you would need to spend about 40% of your income on rent alone. (Source CMHC, *Rental Market Report: Canada and Selected Markets*, January 2021)

The reality is that Ontarians working at or near the current minimum wage or the planned minimum wage earn poverty-level incomes.

**How does your government plan to ensure that paid work is a pathway out of poverty?**

### **Income Security for Ontarians**

Ontario and Canada have done a good job in supporting seniors and families with children through strong income security programs. For working-age adults, the story is different. For many, paid work still leaves them in poverty. For those relying on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) or Ontario Works (OW), income supports leave people in deep poverty – unable to afford decent housing or cover basic expenses of daily living. Not surprisingly, food insecurity, stress levels, and poor mental health are more widespread among people on ODSP and OW.

“59.0% of Ontario households that relied on social assistance—Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)—were food insecure.” (Ontario Dietitians in Public Health, (2020) Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity. Available from: [odph.ca](http://odph.ca).)

The extremely low levels of income support keep people in deep poverty, but they also create a barrier for people moving forward in their lives – including finding paid work that lifts people out of poverty.

Ontario Works and ODSP benefits have not changed since 2018. The cost of living has risen by more than 7% since then and inflation is currently running at about 4% a year.

**How does your government propose lifting the incomes of people relying on ODSP and Ontario Works above the poverty line?**

MCCO remains committed to walking with and supporting people who have experienced homelessness, with refugees and those who have been in prison. We also remain committed to the work of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Our efforts cannot replace the important role of Government

programs and policies. If we hope to live in a land where everyone can live free from poverty, where people can enjoy good mental health, a sense of inclusion in their community, and where we walk the path of reconciliation, then we must rely on strong and supportive provincial policies and programs.

We recognize that as elected representatives, you carry an important responsibility for the wellbeing of all Ontarians. We offer our prayerful support for you and all Members of Provincial Parliament. We look forward to receiving your responses to our questions.

Sincerely,

John Head

Executive Director