



YWCA Ontario Coalition responds to the 2023 Provincial Budget

One of the two themes of this year's provincial budget, tabled by Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy on March 23, was "Working For You." However, YWCA Ontario, a coalition of 10 YWCAs across the province, remains unclear about who the budget is actually working for – because unfortunately, it is not for women, girls and gender-diverse people.

While "corporation" appears 38 times and "business" 104 times in the budget, the word "women" is only mentioned four times. Indeed, the Ontario government seems to take women less seriously with each passing year: women were mentioned 27 times in 2021, eight in 2022, and down to a record low this year. The word "girls" and the word "poverty" were only used once in the 2023 budget, and the word "gender" does not appear whatsoever.

Without this critical gender lens being applied to the province's spending, it is not surprising that this budget falls woefully short of addressing the needs of women, girls and gender-diverse people in Ontario.

Though there are some encouraging moments in the budget, including long-called-for investments in the Ontario Northland transit system – a move that helps ensure women and Indigenous people can move safely through the Northern region – as well as base funding for the mental health and addictions subsector and the Black Youth Action Plan, this budget largely leaves women and girls behind.

Despite making history as the largest budget ever tabled in Ontario at \$204.7 billion, this budget spends billions more on infrastructure, corporate tax breaks and subsidizing hydro bills than it does on addressing the grave economic and social disparities which intensified during the pandemic. Specifically, it fails to address the fact that women, girls and gender diverse individuals bear the brunt of those disparities. A historic amount of spending is meaningless when those investments are not being used to help the people who need it most.

YWCA Ontario's analysis of the budget based on the recommendations we outlined in our [pre-budget submission](#) can be found below:

Child Care

Despite urgent calls for investments in a workforce strategy to address the staffing crisis in child care, Budget 2023 offers no reprieve.



In fact, the budget merely reiterates the high-level details of the Canada-Ontario child care agreement signed in 2022. It did not address any of the recommendations that sector leaders and advocates have long said are required to ensure the success and sustainability of the plan, nor does it include any new investments.

This budget offers no solutions to the staffing crisis, and no measures to ensure Ontario will meet its target of expanding child care spaces by 86,000 this year.

Decent work

This budget did not introduce the ten employer-paid sick days called for by health experts and decent work advocates. Instead, Budget 2023 announced the sunsetting of Ontario's three paid sick day program. Despite knowing that paid sick days save lives, this budget presents a regression that leaves workers lacking basic labour protection. And, despite record-level inflation and heightened concern over the cost of living, this budget presented no minimum wage increase.

Further, the budget does little to address staffing crises facing nonprofit, social service and care sectors - all largely feminized and racialized industries. Budget 2023 offers only some stabilization funding for home and community care providers, which is a welcome investment, but one that does not span widely enough.

During a time of economic uncertainty, ensuring workers have access to basic labour protections, decent work and decent pay is critical to a thriving economy. Without adequate protection and pay, we will continue to witness the mass exodus of workers from the care economy.

Housing

We appreciate the government's \$202 million investment in Indigenous supportive housing and homeless prevention and are pleased to see the government identifying intimate partner violence-specific supportive housing under this stream. However, this budget does not meaningfully address the housing crisis facing the province, particularly for Ontarians who are unhoused and those on low/moderate-income. Cost of living pressures, including relentless rent hikes and grocery costs that are disproportionately impacting low-income individuals, are not addressed in this budget. This lack of investment will increase pressures facing already-overwhelmed nonprofit housing providers and programs supporting unhoused individuals.



This budget also reasserts the government's commitment to Bill 23, which will lead to a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars that municipalities rely on for housing programs and dramatically reduce municipal affordable housing efforts.

Finally, this budget does not provide any substantive investments in emergency shelters or transitional housing – services which are unable to keep up with demand – or a long-term provincial Portable Housing Benefit which would ensure women and other people experiencing income instability can maintain their housing.

Support for the nonprofit sector

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the nonprofit sector stepped up to help those who needed it most. To meet the increased need for social services throughout the pandemic, the provincial government stepped in to provide additional financial support – however, the majority of that funding is not being renewed in this budget.

A lack of long-term, sustainable government funding is putting incredible pressure on the sector and leading to the closure of essential nonprofit agencies across the province, forcing the already overburdened sector to do more with less. While the budget notes that the government will continue to rely on the nonprofit sector to help support Ontarians in need, investments in the sector are largely absent from this budget.

We cannot expect nonprofits to continue serving as Ontario's safety net in times of crisis without adequately funding them.

Social assistance rates

The budget did not introduce any new relief for individuals accessing already abysmal social assistance programs. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) rates remain far below the poverty line. Measures taken throughout the pandemic to increase support for people accessing social assistance have been largely phased out – this amidst a cost of living crisis.

While funds were allocated to index ODSP to inflation over the next three years, this funding still leaves social assistance recipients in legislated poverty. Despite calls for doubling ODSP rates, ODSP recipients will only see a five per cent increase to the basic needs portion of their cheques. Social assistance programs are meant to ensure a person can live a life with dignity, in which their basic needs are met; this budget allocation does nothing to ensure that.

Further, this budget did not introduce any new funding for the nearly 400,000 people accessing OW. This means a single adult accessing OW will continue to receive a maximum of \$733 per



month, an amount that has not increased since 2018 and comes nowhere near the cost of renting any apartment anywhere in Ontario – let alone covering other living expenses.

There are few new affordability measures in the budget, but we welcome the expansion of GAINS, which provides payments to low-income seniors.

Employment, training and upskilling for women

In the days following the release of the budget, the government announced a \$6.9 million investment to expand the Investing in Women’s Futures Program to 10 new locations across the province. We applaud this funding and the expansion of these vital programs. However, more investment in upskilling and reskilling for women is crucial to ensure that women can access high-paying jobs in traditionally male-dominated fields, including technology, advanced manufacturing, and the skilled trades.

Girls Program funding

Just as in this government’s last three budgets, there is no mention of funding for girls programming in 2023.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence continue to cause immeasurable harm to women, girls, and gender-diverse people across the province. In 2022, the Federal Government delivered on its commitment to producing a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence. This plan calls on provinces to tailor and adopt relevant action items for their provinces in order to address the unique challenges in their communities – this budget has not earmarked nearly enough to adequately address GBV in the province of Ontario

The 2023 budget reintroduced many previously announced funding allocations, including a \$2.5 million investment announced in Budget 2022 to continue supporting the Youth Violence and Human Trafficking Prevention Program and the Victim Quick Response Program under its Guns, Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy. This budget also highlighted the \$693 million investment first announced in 2020 to support emergency shelters, counselling and crisis lines for survivors of violence. However, despite recommitting to these programs, this budget does not provide any substantial new investments to adequately respond to the growing GBV crisis in Ontario.

Conclusion

Social services, caretakers, nonprofits, and frontline workers – the very entities that built the fabric of our social safety net throughout the pandemic – seem to have been forgotten in this budget.



The time to invest in people is now. Budget 2023 makes significant investments in infrastructure, but in so many ways, leaves the people of Ontario behind.

As a coalition of organizations supporting more than 40,000 women, girls and gender diverse people across Ontario, we remain deeply concerned for the safety and well-being of our community members. Nonetheless, our commitment to supporting the communities we serve is unwavering as is our willingness to work collaboratively with the government to meaningfully address social and economic inequities in Ontario.