



2025 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

FROM

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[via email]

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Over the past year, little has been accomplished with regards to lifting Ontario residents with disabilities out of poverty. People with disabilities continue to be overrepresented in poverty statistics and are twice as likely to live in [poverty](#) and with [food insecurity](#) than those without disabilities. Since 2020, grocery costs alone have increased approximately 34 per cent while Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefit rates, woefully inadequate to begin with, have only increased at half that rate.

It is also worth noting that it's estimated at least 30 per cent of Ontario Works (OW) recipients cite ill-health as the primary factor preventing them from working, but face numerous barriers to accessing the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) such as lacking a primary care physician, complexity of the application process, language barriers, etc.

Recent government statistics reported by [The Trillium](#) illustrate how low social assistance rates are fueling the province's highly visible and pervasive homelessness crisis, with the number of social assistance recipients experiencing homelessness increasing 100 per cent over the past two years. Meanwhile, a recent report published by the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario](#) (AMO) revealed that homelessness among the general population has increased 25 per cent over the same time period. In other words, social assistance recipients in Ontario are *four times* more likely to become homeless than the general population.

Indeed, municipalities throughout the province grappling with ever-growing homeless encampments have cited low social assistance rates as a primary driver of the crisis. Numerous Ontario municipal councils have passed motions calling on the province to double social assistance rates to help keep up with out-of-control rental costs which have [increased 24 per cent](#) — including new and existing rentals — over just the past three years.

While annual ODSP rate increases were tied to inflation starting in 2023, it did not make up for decades of stagnation and sub-inflationary increases, guaranteeing legislated poverty for recipients in perpetuity. The situation is so grim that [more and more disabled](#) people are quietly accessing Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD) as their only option to escape the lack of benefits and supports available to sustain even a modicum of dignity.

Throughout 2024, ODSP Action Coalition continued to regularly field questions from recipients decrying the antiquated ‘benefit unit’ policies that disincentivize the formation/continuation of intimate relationships due to one’s benefits being reduced based on their partner/spouse’s income. It has [been well observed](#) that such draconian policies are also indirectly contributing to the housing crisis as couples are compelled to occupy two units of housing instead of one so their already meagre benefits are not further reduced. As a result, the proportion of recipients who are single continues to hover around 90 per cent, including sole support parents.

On the flip-side, when a recipient’s benefits are reduced due to their partner/spouse’s income, the same ‘benefit unit’ policies that disincentivize cohabitation can also dangerously expose recipients to financial/physical/mental abuse by their non-disabled partner, with little or no resources to escape.

The portion of ODSP benefits designated as ‘shelter’ allowance, which currently sits at \$582 per month, can only be viewed as symbolic at best because it is not reflected anywhere in real-world ‘what-the-market-will-bear’ costs. With the vast majority of recipients residing in private market rentals — close to 70 per cent, per the latest MCCSS statistics publicly available [\(2019\)](#) — it is no wonder that thousands are winding up in shelters, living on the streets or in encampments after they’re displaced and can’t find another place they can afford.

Of course, once a recipient loses their housing, when they are physically and mentally at their lowest point and need the most help, the province inexplicably reduces their benefits by taking away the shelter allowance. Having less money obviously is not going to help anyone secure their next home.

Subsidized housing tenants whose primary income is from sources other than ODSP or OW typically pay 30 per cent of their monthly income on rent, often referred to as RGI (rent-geared-to-income). Those whose primary source of income is ODSP or OW pay artificially low rents as prescribed by the province’s rent-geared-to-income [\(RGI\) rent scales](#), in which monthly rent for a single person on OW is \$85 per month, and for a single on ODSP is \$109. Recipients of course do not receive more shelter allowance than the prescribed amounts. These artificially low rents have been imposed by the province, unchanged, for **over three decades**.

Over the years, provincial and municipal [governments](#) of varying stripes, [social policy experts](#), etc. have suggested/contemplated ending the artificially low OW/ODSP rent

scales and moving all tenants to true RGI. Doing so would remove obstacles to implementing a flat-rate structure for OW and ODSP by combining the current maximum 'Basic Needs' and 'Shelter' components of social assistance into a single base amount for all recipients of each program, which would have positive knock-on effects on several fronts, as it would:

- provide cash-strapped municipalities with desperately needed funds to help pay for repairs and upkeep of crumbling social housing or invest in new social housing stock,
- provide simple, predictable support across the board and eliminate discrepancies based on individual circumstances, including those who are homeless, in shelters, congregate settings or board and lodge situations,
- reduce paperwork and administrative burden/complexity for both recipients and caseworkers, including recipients who have difficulty obtaining rent receipts from absentee/non-responsive landlords,
- eliminate 'sticker-shock' if/when recipients' income increases and they are suddenly switched from the artificially low RGI scale to true RGI, which often happens particularly when recipients turn 65 and transition off social assistance to CPP/OAS/GIS.

With the above considerations in mind and in no particular order, we urgently call on the province to immediately take steps to implement the following recommendations in 2025:

1. As a start, immediately double ODSP and OW rates and tie future OW increases to the annual rate of inflation as the province did with ODSP starting in 2023. Doubling OW would still be below the MBM *Deep* Poverty line of [\\$1558 per month](#), but it would be a marked improvement. Doubling ODSP would bring the maximum monthly rate for a single person to the MBM Poverty Line of [\\$2236 per month](#) plus ~\$500 to account for some of the [additional costs](#) associated with living with a disability.
2. Replace the current myriad social assistance rate structures with a single flat-rate for recipients of both ODSP and OW by combining the current maximum basic needs and shelter components into one base amount, irrespective of clients' living arrangements.

3. Double the maximum Special Diet Allowance, which has remained unchanged for over a decade. As mentioned above, food and grocery prices have increase 34 per cent compared to only four years ago.
4. Using a GBA+ lens, adopt a hybrid definition of the antiquated 'benefit unit' for ODSP/OW recipients that does not reduce a recipient's benefits as a result of other household income. Times have changed considerably since the definition of the benefit unit was first established.
5. Double the earnings exemption to \$2,000 per month while reducing the clawback rate to 50 per cent on earnings over \$2,000, and increase the earnings exemption for non-disabled partners/spouses to match that of their disabled partner/spouse.
6. With a finite number of housing options that social assistance recipients can afford, create a 'made in Ontario' portable housing benefit that prioritizes homeless people with disabilities and those receiving social assistance paying private-market rent, so they're able to remain housed. The province must recommit to building *deeply* affordable, adequate, and accessible housing, while increasing age-appropriate supportive housing options, where residents can live with security, comfort and dignity.
7. Reinstate stronger rent controls, including closing the 2018 rent control loophole (which exempts rent control on units first occupied after Nov 15, 2018), initiating vacancy control that maintains the rent of a housing unit between tenancies and abolish above guideline rent increases (AGIs).
8. Double the Employment and Training Startup Benefit which also hasn't increased in well over a decade, while costs have increased significantly.
9. Reverse the outsourcing of ODSP/OW employment services to third-party entities and remove "pay per performance" incentives that risk coercing clients into potentially dangerous, ill-suited, dead-end, and/or low paying jobs, while letting others fall through the cracks.
10. Exempt TFSAs, RRSPs and other investments generally intended for retirement from ODSP and OW asset limit considerations so that clients may have a chance of avoiding complete destitution when they turn 65.
11. Let ODSP/OW recipients keep more of their money by treating 'income replacement' programs like Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPP- D)



Employment Insurance (EI), and injured workers (WSIB) entitlements the same as earnings from employment.

12. Introduce a Digital Allowance to help recipients pay for internet/wi-fi and web-enabled devices so they are able to stay connected with caseworkers, and access other essential resources/information. The province's own "Digital First" strategy demands it.
13. Where applicable, allow social assistance recipients free access to public transit.
14. Make a public commitment that the province will not claw back any amount of social assistance as a result of the federal Canada Disability Benefit which is slated to start rolling out in July 2025.

We appreciate your consideration and immediate implementation of the above recommendations that will help people with disabilities to live with the security, autonomy, adequacy, and dignity they deserve.

Sincerely,
[via email]

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Founded in early 2000s, ODSP Action Coalition is a volunteer, grassroots provincial advocacy group led by Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients, with a network of valued allies including legal workers, disability/poverty-related NGOs/NPOs, health care professionals, social policy experts and other advocates. Our mandate includes advocating for improvements to ODSP to allow for clients of the program to live with adequacy, security and dignity.