

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Strategic Policy Division
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Poverty Reduction Strategy Submission

ODSP Action Coalition is a grassroots, volunteer organization led by people with disabilities on ODSP, with a network of allies including community organizations, legal clinic workers, social policy experts and other advocates committed to advancing the dignity and human-rights of people with disabilities who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). We are submitting this statement to ensure Ontario's next Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) takes a realistic, human-rights approach to fighting poverty built on evidence-based solutions, a foundation of honesty and effective action.

That foundation must begin with a single, undeniable step: the provincial government must end the deep systemic poverty and ever-expanding homelessness it directly creates through its own social assistance policies.

Premier Doug Ford has publicly claimed that his government "takes care of" people with disabilities. Based on our own experience and the evidence around us in communities throughout Ontario, ODSP Action Coalition must state unequivocally that this claim is false. This is not a matter of competing ideologies, but a verifiable fact.

The number of ODSP recipients in Ontario who are homeless has increased by [40 per cent](#) since 2022 and the numbers are trending in the wrong direction. In Toronto last year, ODSP was the [second most](#) reported source of income among unhoused people, second only to Ontario Works, and lack of money was the top reason cited by ODSP recipients for not being able to afford rent.

Between 2019 and 2024, overall visits to Ontario food banks increased a whopping [134 per cent](#), with the majority of users, 60 per cent, citing social assistance as their primary source of income. Almost 30 per cent were in receipt of 'disability-related' benefits, primarily ODSP. And people with disabilities are nearly four times as likely to be severely food insecure compared to those without a disability.

"Taking care of" someone does not mean forcing them to live on an income that is so far below the poverty line they cannot realize their right to nutritious food and a safe, dignified place to call home.

“Taking care of” someone means not forcing them to make impossible choices between food, medication and rent, or trapping them in a system of clawbacks that penalizes any attempt to supplement their income to bring themselves closer to the poverty line.

The reality of life on ODSP, a program administered by the Ontario government, is one of hunger, poor health, isolation, and constant fear of being evicted into a housing market recipients cannot afford. This is not care; it is neglect.

Tying ODSP rate increases to annual inflation starting in 2023 was a step in the right direction, but it did not make up for decades of stagnation and sporadic, incremental increases that continue to leave rates well below any measure of poverty. ODSP’s single maximum rate of \$1,408 per month is a policy choice that keeps hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities in a state of severe financial deprivation.

Any poverty reduction strategy that does not first recognize that being free from poverty is a human right, and sets measurable targets toward achieving that goal, is just another cynical public relations exercise without substance.

Therefore, the first and most non-negotiable step of the new PRS must be to align government policy with the Premier’s rhetoric of “taking care of” people with disabilities.

We demand the government immediately raise ODSP and OW rates to at least the Market Basket Measure poverty line and permanently index them to inflation.

We demand the government immediately take steps to ensure the right to safe, appropriate and dignified housing is realized for all Ontario residents, bring back full rent controls and stop criminalizing homelessness.

ODSP Action Coalition calls on this government to stop creating the very poverty the PRS aims to reduce, and promote the human rights of all Ontario residents.

Begin your new plan by ending the crisis you directly control. Raise social assistance rates to the poverty line. Until you do, no Poverty Reduction Strategy can be taken seriously.

Sincerely,

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