



END CHILD POVERTY IN CANADA

**Submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and
Housing Consultation:
Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy**

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Ontario Campaign 2000 is a non partisan provincial coalition with 66 member organizations across the province working to end child and family poverty in Ontario (members listed in Appendix 1). www.campaign2000.ca/Ontario/index.html

Introduction

Ontario Campaign 2000 partners welcome the Ontario Government's commitment to develop a Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy. Many of the partners in our coalition participated in the regional consultations. We know from our work on poverty reduction that ensuring access to good quality affordable housing is key to the province's ability to meet the target of the Poverty Reduction Strategy: reduce the rate of child and family poverty by 25% by 2013.

As a member of the Housing Network of Ontario we echo the need for Ontario's first Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy to be comprehensive, fully funded and include specific targets to reduce housing insecurity. We know that housing insecurity, homelessness and poverty are inseparably linked. We believe that people with lived experience of housing insecurity should be consulted and involved in an ongoing basis in the development and implementation of Ontario's Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy.

Most low income families in Ontario live in private rental or social housing. Rising shelter and utility costs are the biggest single expense for most low and modest income families with children. The supply of new rental housing is desperately short of the need, and average rents have increased beyond what most tenant households can afford to pay. Census data shows that over the past twenty years the percentage of Ontario tenant households living in unaffordable housing (where they spend 30% or more of income on housing), has steadily risen from 32% to 45%. The number of Ontario renters who are couples with children living in core housing need (i.e. living in unaffordable, substandard or over-crowded housing) declined by 5% between 2001-2006 to 68,200. For lone parent families who were renting, the number of households living in core housing need rose from 88,500 in 2001, to 93,000 in 2006 (ONPHA, *Where's Home? 2008*. Appendix A)

Recommendations

→ ***Develop a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy with targets & timelines to reduce housing insecurity.***

- All Ontario families should have homes that cost no more than 30% of their net income and which leave them sufficient income for the other necessities of life.
- Affordable housing must be seen as a core community need with consistent funding in each provincial budget, not a patchwork of programs that lack continuity.
- Annual targets for the construction of new affordable housing units should be set and delivered on.

→ ***Provide a Housing Benefit to low income tenants to reduce high shelter costs.***

- Part of the solution to addressing housing insecurity is to make existing rental housing more affordable for low income families.
- A Housing Benefit, similar to programs in Quebec, BC and Manitoba, should be available to all low income tenants who spend more than 30% of their income on rent, including both social assistance recipients and the working poor.
- There should be no clawbacks for social assistance recipients.
- Ontario Campaign 2000 calls on the Province to make a downpayment on the Affordable Housing Strategy by introducing a Housing Benefit in the 2010 budget.

→ ***Invest to build more affordable housing and new supportive housing.***

-Ontario Campaign 2000 supports the recommendation of the Housing Network of Ontario for the Province to fund a housing program that creates a minimum of 10,000 affordable new housing units per year.

-This should include supportive housing where programs and services support people with disabilities, mental health issues and addictions to maintain their housing.

-Affordable housing is a public good, a valuable long term asset that supports healthy, stronger communities.

→ ***Invest to bring aging social housing stock up to standard***

-Fund a program for regular repair and maintenance of new and existing social housing.

-Ensure strong building standards and enforcement.

→ ***Strengthen tenant protection legislation***

-Remove the vacancy de-control provisions of the *Residential Tenancies Act* which allow landlords to raise rents beyond rent control guidelines when a unit becomes vacant.

-Amend the *Residential Tenancies Act* to remove the exemptions for rent regulation which apply to new buildings.

-Increase education about tenant rights and ensure enforcement of decisions by the Landlord and Tenant Board regarding repairs and maintenance.

→ ***Press federal government to create and fund a national affordable housing program***

-The federal government must play its role by continuing to fund a housing and homelessness strategy, as well as expanding and upgrading the stock of social housing.

Conclusion

To make progress on reducing child and family poverty provincial leadership on affordable housing is required. If the Ontario economy is to remain competitive we need an adequate supply of affordable housing for workers. In this time of recession public investments in construction of affordable housing and rehabilitation of existing stock provide job creation and economic stimulus. Ontario Campaign 2000 urges the Province to follow through on the promise and deliver a comprehensive Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy with funding allocations and annual targets for construction of new affordable homes, new supportive homes, upgrading of social housing stock, and a housing benefit for low income tenants.

Appendix 1 – Ontario Campaign 2000 Partners:

Ontario Social Development Council (Toronto), Interfaith Social Assistance Review Coalition (Waterloo), Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (Toronto), Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (Toronto), Ontario Association of Social Workers (Toronto), Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (Toronto), Children's Mental Health Ontario (Toronto), Ontario Public Health Association (Toronto), Ontario Federation of Labour (Toronto), Ontario Public Service Employees Union (Toronto), Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (Toronto), Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (Toronto),

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (Toronto), United Steelworkers of America, District 6 (Toronto), Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs (Toronto), Ontario Association of Food Banks (Toronto), Provincial Council of Women of Ontario (Niagara-on-the-Lake), The Community Social Planning Council (Toronto), Children's Aid Society of Toronto/Metro Campaign 2000 (Toronto), Family Service Association of Toronto (Toronto), Our Kids Our Future (Toronto), South Asian Family Support Services (Toronto), Community Development Halton (Burlington), Social Planning Council of Peel (Mississauga), Peel Poverty Action Group (Mississauga); Peterborough Social Planning Council (Peterborough), Durham Child Poverty Task Force (Ajax), 905-Area Faith Community Leaders; Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth (Hamilton); Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton (Ottawa), Ottawa-Carleton CPAG (Ottawa), Children's Aid Society of Ottawa-Carleton (Ottawa); Hastings & Prince Edward Legal Services (Belleville); Southwestern Ontario CPAG (London), Sisters of St. Joseph of the Diocese of London, Ontario (London), CAPC Niagara Brighter Futures (Niagara); Lakehead Social Planning Council (Thunder Bay), North Bay Labour Council; Income Security Advocacy Centre (Toronto), Elgin St. Thomas Health Unit (Sudbury), Ontario Association of Interval Transition Housing, Canadian Tamil Women's Community, Children's Aid Society of Peel, Legal Assistance of Windsor, Nellies, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care, Workers Action Centre (Toronto), Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, African Canadian Social Development Council, Social Planning Council of Sudbury, Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries, Kingston Lennox, Frontenac & Addington Children's Services Steering Committee, Ontario Public School Boards Association, Community Development Council Durham, Early Childhood Community Development Centre (St Catharines, The STOP Community Food Centre; Northumberland Coalition Against Poverty; the Help Centre of Northumberland; Northumberland Community Legal Clinic; Family Service Ontario; Interim Place (Mississauga) .