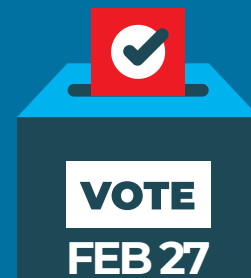


EMPLOYMENT, INCOME & POVERTY



On February 27, cast your vote for economic equality

Ontario is facing **growing job insecurity, income inequality, and rates of poverty**, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and cuts to public programs. Employment incomes and social assistance rates have failed to keep up with the cost of living.

The upcoming provincial election is a chance to push for better social supports, fair wages, and investments in public and nonprofit employment services.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?



Poverty is on the rise

Ontario's poverty rate is 18.4%, according to the [latest available data](#). Nearly a quarter (24.5%) of Ontarians continue to [face food insecurity](#).

Toronto is the child poverty capital of Canada. [Between 2020 and 2022, the rate of childhood poverty in Toronto increased from 16.8% to 25.3% \(this equates to 117,890 children\)](#). Systemic discrimination leads to higher poverty rates among Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and newcomer children, as well as families living in under-served neighbourhoods across the city.

Inadequate social assistance traps people in poverty

Both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates are well below the poverty line, with single individuals on [OW receiving a maximum of \\$733 per month](#) and those on ODSP receiving up to \$1,368 monthly.

Ontario remains the only province to [not have increased its OW rates](#) for single individuals since 2018. Meanwhile, the cost of essential goods and services [has increased by 20% in the same period](#). OW is often a stopgap for women with children escaping domestic violence, teens leaving abusive homes, and low-wage workers who are injured on the job with no access to other benefits.

While ODSP rates saw a 4.5% inflation-based adjustment in 2024, the monthly increase of \$60 will barely make a difference in people's lives and does not adequately account for the additional costs associated with living with disabilities.

Minimum wage is not keeping up with the cost of living

Ontario's **minimum wage** is currently \$17.20/hour, with a potential increase coming in October 2025. A significant disparity still remains between the minimum wage and the living wage, the hourly wage needed to cover basic expenses in different cities. The living wage in Ontario ranges from \$19.50 to \$26/hour according to the **Ontario Living Wage Network**.

Changes to employment services are creating gaps for jobseekers

Ontario's **unemployment rate** recently rose to 7.6%. The Province is rolling out **Integrated Employment Services**, a "modernization" of its social assistance and employment services. The new model moves social assistance under Employment Ontario.

18.2%

youth unemployment rate

In practice, the transformation has led to the **privatization** of service delivery, **unsustainable caseloads** for frontline workers, and **funding cutbacks** based on performance metrics that are not responsive to the holistic needs of people on social assistance, particularly people with disabilities, nor to the nonprofit organizations that want to deliver high quality, relevant services. For example, Ontario's youth unemployment rate hit 18.2% in **December 2024**, yet dedicated **programs for youth** have been cut.

4 QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CANDIDATE

What actions will you take to develop a comprehensive and intersectional provincial poverty reduction strategy with explicit targets to reduce and eliminate poverty in Ontario?

Will you double the rates of Ontario Works and ODSP and ensure they are indexed to inflation to raise social assistance recipients out of poverty and make life more affordable?

What changes will you make to improve the Integrated Employment Services to better support job seekers and people on social assistance, notably people with disabilities and job seekers facing complex barriers?

What actions will you take to raise the minimum wage in line with the living wage for Ontario?

For more information and resources and to learn about important issues in the provincial election, please visit:



socialplanningtoronto.org/2025_ontario_election

