Ontario Election 2014: Where Do the Parties Stand on Ontario Works (OW)?



Steering Committee on Social Assistance

Representing Ontario Community Legal Clinics in advocating on social assistance issues

Question We Asked	Green Party	Liberal Party	NDP	Progressive Conservative Party
Does your party have plans to reform Ontario's social assistance programs? If so, what reforms would you make?	Establish a public commission to determine how Ontario can best implement a program to provide a guaranteed annual income (GAI) for all citizens.	 Major commitment to reform guided by four objectives: motivate and support people to be successful in the workforce; provide adequate assistance; deliver modern, responsive services; ensure confidence in the system. Lift the lowest rates and increase support for individuals with disabilities. Simplify employment benefits (see below). Replace Northern Allowance with Remote Communities Allowance and increase by \$50 / month for first person and \$25 / month for each additional family member. 	Begin by increasing social assistance rates by 1%. Work with Ontarians to improve social assistance programs so they are accessible when people need them.	No response - referral to party platform. Backgrounder says: Merge OW and ODSP to save \$100 million in 2015-16, \$160 million in 2016-17, and \$160 million in 2017-18 (total \$420 million over 3 years). Conduct an "income maintenance program review" to save \$200 million in 2015-16, \$600 million in 2016-17, and \$700 million in 2017-18 (total \$1.5 billion over 3 years).

Question We Asked	Green Party	Liberal Party	NDP	Progressive Conservative Party
Will your party commit to ensuring that the incomes people get when they're on OW are enough to afford housing, food, clothing, a phone, transportation, and other regular necessities? What specific investments will you make to ensure incomes are adequate?	The GAI would ensure that all Ontarians have adequate income for life's necessities.	Committed to develop a fair definition of adequacy and a way of calculating it so that increases to rates are more predictable and based on evidence.	 Yes. Begin by raising social assistance rates by 1%. Oppose the continuing clawback of the Ontario Child Benefit through Basic Needs allowance reductions. Link the Ontario Child Benefit to inflation. Increase the minimum wage to \$12 / hour by 2016 and index it to inflation. 	No response - referral to party platform. See above.
Will your party commit to changing OW and ODSP rules to make pursuit of child support voluntary and to treat child support income the same as earned income?	Review the system and study the best ways in which to co-ordinate social assistance benefits so that children and families are getting the help that they need.	 Index the Ontario Child Benefit maximum benefit and income threshold to inflation. Release second Poverty Reduction Strategy within 60 days of returning to the legislature. 	Work with parents, recipients, and advocates to determine the best way forward with respect to child support income.	No response - referral to party platform, which is silent on this issue.
Will your party reinstate the CSUMB program within social assistance? If not, what will you do to ensure that there are sufficient funds in the CHPI program to meet the need in communities? And what will you do to ensure that all municipalities have a program that is comparable to CSUMB and make program information publicly available?	Review the CHPI program to assess whether it has sufficient funds to meet each community in which it is needed.	Make \$42.5 million in transition funding a permanent addition to CHPI.	 Work closely with municipalities, recipients and advocates to end the chaos caused by cuts. Ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet the needs of the community. Ensure that all Ontarians can access supports regardless of where they reside. 	No response - referral to party platform, which is silent on this issue.

Question We Asked	Green Party	Liberal Party	NDP	Progressive Conservative Party
What will your party do to improve employment supports and training, including access to post-secondary education and OSAP funding, for people on OW?	 Responsibly invest in training programs that fill the needs of our future economy, facilitate access to jobs, and better manage the costs of postsecondary education to reduce student debt. Improve supports and training for those on OW. Work with student organizations and the federal government to revise the tax credit system for university tuition to make it work better. Provide refundable tax credits for businesses that participate in training and certification programs in job growth areas. Provide refundable tax credits for businesses that participate in apprenticeship, cooperative and mentorship programs. 	Streamline employment benefits by replacing seven separate employment benefits within a consolidated benefit structure. Continue to simplify the interaction between OSAP and social assistance.	 Freeze tuition fees. Make provincial student loans interest-free. Invest in re-training programs for workers over the age of 55. Ensure that OW recipients can access meaningful educational and employment opportunities. 	No response - referral to party platform, which is silent on this issue.