



INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CENTRE
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Media Release

April 7, 2020

More than 130 Community Organizations Call on Ontario to Cancel Clawbacks and Increase Supports for Vulnerable People During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Open Letter and Virtual Press Conference

TORONTO – In an [open letter](#) to the Minister of Children, Community, and Social Services, a broad coalition of low-income Ontarians, food banks, health providers, faith groups, and community organizations from across the Province call for crucial changes to Ontario's social assistance programs. Groups called on Ontario not to claw back federal benefits from Ontario Works and ODSP recipients, and to provide increased benefits for the most vulnerable in this challenging time, similar to the recent policy changes in BC.

The signatories are holding a virtual press conference to sound the alarm: poverty and pandemic are a recipe for disaster.

Where: [Zoom](#): Meeting ID: 315 283 979; Password: 321934

When: April 8, 2020, at 10.00 a.m.

Speakers:

- Arash Ghiassi, Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC)
- Andrea Hatala, ODSP Action Coalition
- Dr. Jonathon Herriot, Health Providers Against Poverty
- René Guitard, Clinique juridique francophone d'Ottawa
- Talia Bronstein, Daily Bread Food Bank

The letter, signed by more than 130 organizations, calls for two immediate changes.

First, the letter calls for social assistance rates to be immediately increased. “Even in the best of times, it is next to impossible to survive on these rates, which are far below the poverty line,” said Andrea Hatala, Recipient Co-Chair, ODSP Action Coalition. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, when low-income people face added costs of self-isolation and increased need for safe, stable housing and nutritious food, they are unconscionable.”

Raising the rates would also mean more people will qualify for social assistance. This is crucial for many low-income Ontarians who currently do not qualify for any provincial or federal benefits but who are hit hard by the current crisis.

Second, the letter calls for Ontario to not claw back federal benefits from social assistance recipients. “Currently, any income received from sources other than employment is generally deducted dollar-for-dollar from social assistance benefits. This prevents low income Ontarians from fully benefiting from Employment Insurance (EI) or the newly announced Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB),” the letter reads.

Similar changes have already been made in BC, where CERB and EI payments are exempted and social assistance payments are increased. “Federal benefits are meant for families hard hit by the pandemic, not provincial coffers,” said Hatala. “Low-income Ontarians need these benefits, and they should be able to keep it, like in BC”.

Media contacts:

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ISAC is a community legal clinic with a mandate to advance the systemic interests and rights of low-income Ontarians around income security programs and low-wage precarious employment.

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