

The **ODSP Action Coalition** is calling on all political parties to support improvements to ODSP and to housing for low-income people in Ontario.

### 1. Raise ODSP rates to \$1,915 / month and tie them to inflation going forward

- ODSP rates are lower now in real terms than they were when the program started in 1998. Rates were frozen for eight years and, since 2005, only very small annual increases have been made. People with disabilities have been forced to live in poverty, contributing to deteriorating mental and physical health and further social exclusion.
- Raising the rates to \$1,915 would bring them in line with what they should have been if they had kept pace with inflation, with a \$500 adder to recognize the additional cost of disability.
- Higher incomes would create savings in other areas, like health care and other social services. Tying rates to inflation would ensure that people with disabilities would be able to afford the rising cost of living.

### 2. Ensure everyone gets the full basic needs and shelter amounts

- People on ODSP and Ontario Works (OW) get separate amounts for “basic needs” and “shelter”. They have to regularly report on details about their housing like how much they pay, who they live with and their relationships status.
- Certain groups – people who are homeless or live in supportive housing or group homes – get less money based on their living situation. This is discriminatory and prevents people from getting housing.
- Moving to the “standard flat rate” recommended in the *Income Security Roadmap for Change* would ensure everyone gets the full benefit amounts, and would eliminate reporting rules and unnecessary paperwork.

### 3. Transform ODSP from a punitive to an inclusive system

- The current system is intrusive and demeaning. As recommended in the *Roadmap*, it needs to be transformed to recognize our UN Convention rights by:
  - Changing the role of caseworkers from “welfare police” to supportive service providers to help us build on our strengths and achieve our goals.
  - Making ODSP and OW easier to access. OW must also be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities, given that 70% of people on ODSP start on OW.
  - Reducing the large number of rules and reporting requirements.
  - Making social inclusion a goal of the program and improving employment supports, including the amount of money people can keep from work.
  - Making ODSP and OW responsive to the real needs of people who are more likely to struggle, including people with disabilities, single parents, people from racialized communities, Indigenous people and others, so that these needs can be addressed in a supportive, empathetic, pro-active way.

#### 4. Implement recommendations of the *Income Security Roadmap for Change*

- In addition to the recommendations mentioned above, this includes:
  - Giving health and housing benefits to low-income people outside social assistance, while improving existing benefits for those on ODSP.
  - Guaranteeing an income that is adequate to people's needs.
  - Working with people with disabilities to build a better program that includes eliminating asset rules, allowing people to keep other public benefits, and making it easier for people who are pursuing employment goals, and that recognizes the need many have for long-term supports.
  - Ensuring First Nations ultimately create and control income security programs for their own communities.

#### 5. Make quality, appropriate housing available to all

- Ontario's current stock of social housing and supportive housing does not meet demand. 70% of ODSP recipients have to rent in the private market. What is available rents for well above the \$489 single person maximum shelter rate that ODSP recipients can receive. These problems must be resolved, starting with:
  - Building more barrier-free social housing using universal design principles.
  - Improving the quality of current social housing stock.
  - Investing in improvements to the supportive housing system.
  - Introducing vacancy decontrol in the private rental market to protect existing and new tenants. This will prevent landlords from dramatically increasing the rent when a tenant moves out without substantial renovations.
  - Providing supports for low-income people who own their own homes.

#### About the ODSP Action Coalition

The ODSP Action Coalition is a province-wide network of people with lived-experience of ODSP, community agencies, anti-poverty groups and community legal clinics. The coalition addresses the intersection of disability and poverty.

People with disabilities face significant barriers to employment and daily living; at the same time, income security programs, particularly ODSP, fall well below the poverty line with minimal support.

The coalition recognizes that inadequate levels of income support are political decisions, but that people with disabilities are not a group that traditionally holds decision-making power.

We amplify our voices so that **people with disabilities can live with justice and dignity.**