

# PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2022: PARTICIPATION GUIDE

**The provincial election is coming up on  
Thursday June 2, 2022!**

This participation guide includes information on:

- What types of decisions the province is responsible for when it comes to income security issues
- How and where to vote
- How to talk to local candidates and get your concerns front and centre

We have also included guides on major income security issues like social assistance and workers rights that you can use for your information and to help guide questions to your local candidates.

## **What is the provincial government responsible for when it comes to income security issues?**

The provincial government is responsible for setting the laws, regulations, and funding levels for Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). They are responsible for:

- Official legislation, regulations, and policy directives that guide OW and ODSP programs;
- Tribunals and judicial boards like the Landlord & Tenant Board (LTB) and the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) which interpret legislation and make rulings about disputes; and,
- Decisions about or changes to the regulations that guide how these programs are designed and delivered.

These decisions include:

- Setting the limits to how much people receiving supports through these programs can earn, keep, and maintain in terms of assets (cars, property, etc.);
- Deciding how OW and ODSP income and benefits will interact with other benefit programs like Employment Insurance (EI);
- Setting the monthly rate amounts for people receiving social assistance; and
- Deciding who is allowed to access provincial social assistance programs.

The province is also responsible for deciding and enforcing the [Employment Standards Act](#), which regulates:

- Minimum wage rates
- Statutory holidays
- Vacation pay rates
- Rules about employment termination
- Types of employment contracts
- Many other labour-related issues



# PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2022: GET ACTIVE!

**Election campaign times can be used to raise the poverty-related issues that you care about.**

Before election day, during the campaign period, you can put pressure on candidates to tell you and your community where they and their parties stand and what they will do about poverty-related issues in Ontario.

## **Your role at election time:**

- Ask all the political candidates in your area where they stand on your issue.
- Hold the candidates accountable for their party's positions or for policies or laws that they supported.
- Focus on the goal of making poverty an election issue and getting your local political candidates to make commitments that you want them to keep.

During an election campaign your local candidates are in full-on election-mode, which means:

- They do not want bad press.
- They do not want to make public promises that can be used against them in the future.
- They want to show you they care so they can be elected.

## **Between now and election day, you can:**

- Draw attention to the urgent need to fix social assistance and improve and expand access to workers' rights.
- Pressure political candidates to commit to: increasing rates; building a building an accessible, integrated, responsive, comprehensive and uncomplicated social assistance system; improving access to justice; and designing and enforcing more equitable and just employment laws.
- Build a strong core of people focused on holding your political candidates accountable.
- Hold or attend an all-candidates meeting, or write to your local news outlets.

## **Attend All-Candidates meetings in your area**

- Prepare questions for the candidates on the issues facing your local community. TIP: You can use our issue guides to help with questions and details.
- Get a group of friends to attend as well and assign a different question to different people in your group.
- Try to speak from your experience but keep it brief.
- Make note of candidates' responses. Post the info to your social media accounts.
- If you are attending an in-person meeting, try to stick around during the question period, to further discuss your issues with candidates.

How to find your local all candidates meetings:

- Check with your local legal clinic, community groups, and local organizations.
- Check political party websites, social media, local media, or Google it.
- Check out information boards at your local library.

You can also call your local candidates offices and ask to speak directly with them!



# PROVINCIAL ELECTION 2022: HOW AND WHERE TO VOTE

## How and where to vote

Elections Ontario has the most up to date information about how and where to vote: <https://eregistration.elections.on.ca/en/home>

Their website also includes an eRegistration option so voters can check their status or add themselves to the voting list.

People who have no fixed address can vote in the area where they have been living for the 5 weeks before the election date. Food banks and shelters can offer houseless people a “Certificate of Identity and Residence”.

If you are not on the list of voters on election day, you can register on the spot at the polling location associated with your address (check Elections Ontario website for this information during the election period).

According to Elections Ontario, photo ID is not required to vote. If you choose to provide photo ID, your appearance does not need to match the photo. You do not need to provide any information about your sex or gender expression when you go to vote. ID can be shown on a mobile device. International ID or permanent resident cards are not accepted.

## Check that you are on the voters list, update your address, or register to vote:

<https://eregistration.elections.on.ca/en/home>

## Find out the different ways you can vote (i.e. in person, by mail, etc.):

<https://www.elections.on.ca/en/voting-in-ontario/how-to-vote.html>

## Use your postal code to find out which riding you live in:

<https://voterinformationservice.elections.on.ca/en/election/search?mode=postalCode>

## Find out more about political parties and their platforms:

Green Party of Ontario: <https://gpo.ca/>

Ontario Liberal Party: <https://ontarioliberal.ca/>

Ontario New Democratic Party: <https://www.ontariondp.ca/>

Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario: <https://ontariopc.ca/>

Full list of all registered political parties:

<https://finances.elections.on.ca/en/registered-parties>



# END POVERTY NOW!

## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES ARE TOO LOW

**What you can do:** Demand that social assistance rates be raised. Ask candidates if they will do so, by how much, in what time frame, and if they will index rate increases to inflation.

- People living on social assistance live in deep poverty.
- They can't afford adequate food, decent housing and medical supplies.
- Almost 60% of food bank users are on social assistance.
- Their situation is becoming more desperate because rates have been frozen since 2018, while inflation continues to increase by over 11%.
- A single person on Ontario Works (OW) receives \$733/mth.
- A single person on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) receives \$1169/mth.
- At the same time, Ontario is saving money because of lower caseloads. OW caseloads are almost 22% lower than at the start of the pandemic. ODSP caseloads are down 4%.

## CLAWBACKS KEEP PEOPLE TRAPPED IN POVERTY

**What you can do:** Ask candidates if they will commit to ending all clawbacks so people who live in poverty are not penalized for accessing other benefits or earning small incomes.

- The Ontario government claws back dollar for dollar back the federal benefits such as Canada Pension Plan Disability (CPPD) and Employment Insurance (EI) from families on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program.
- Even during the height of the pandemic, Ontario clawed back 50% after the first \$200 Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). This means that poor people kept less of their pandemic benefits when they needed it most.
- Clawbacks create a ceiling on income that traps people in poverty.
- The provincial government saved millions of dollars from clawbacks on social assistance clients as a result of federal pandemic benefits.

## DISCRIMINATION CONTRIBUTES TO HIGHER POVERTY RATES

**What you can do:** Ask candidates what they intend to do to alleviate poverty for all equity-seeking groups.

- Rates of poverty are higher for women, Indigenous people and racialized people.
- Working age people with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty.
- Recent immigrants have a low-income rate of 31.4%, more than twice the rate of non-immigrants at 12.5%.
- People with precarious immigration status are particularly disadvantaged and they may have barriers to accessing government benefits.
- Racialized people have a low-income rate of 21.3%, almost double the rate of 11.5% for non-racialized Ontario residents.
- Over 30% of working-age singles in Ontario were low-income in 2020.

**Social assistance rates must be raised significantly and immediately!**

**End clawbacks on ALL benefits!**

**Women, people with disabilities, Indigenous people, racialized people and people with precarious immigration status should not experience higher rates of poverty!**



# INCREASE DIGITAL ACCESS

## DIGITAL ACCESS FOR ALL

**What you can do:** Ask candidates to provide funding to clinics and clients in the form of a monthly digital access benefit to ensure everyone can access the services they need.

- Remote hearings are now the default option at social justice tribunals.
- In-person hearing requests are only granted for Ontario Human Rights Code accommodation or if people can prove that the default hearing format would be unfair to them. This places the burden on people to prove their needs.
- Accessing tribunals online can be difficult for many people. The online portals are not always created with users in mind. For example, there was little consultation before the online portals at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) were put into place.
- Online tribunals are inaccessible to those without digital skills and/or without reliable Internet service.
- Public access terminals at the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) are only made available on request in four major centres that are too far away for many. Access to these terminals is decided by request and on a case-by-case basis.

## DIGITAL ACCESS IS NEEDED TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**What you can do:** Ask candidates to include users when designing digital processes and tools, and to make sure there are hybrid models with both digital and in-person options for hearings and access to caseworkers.

- The new modernization plans for social assistance include increased use of tools that can only be accessed online.
- MyBenefits is an online platform for clients to communicate with caseworkers, upload and receive documents, and to review payments, overpayments and other decisions.
- Another online tool is the Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA). It is an online centralized application. It uses drop-down menus that may not provide all of the options for individual circumstances and accommodation.
- The use of this online tool could increase barriers with accessing social assistance.

## COSTS OF DIGITIZATION

**What you can do:** Let candidates know the challenges presented to you personally. Share your stories, your clients' stories, or help clients share their stories.

- 29% of people living with disabilities, who also use food banks, have 'no access' to regular or reliable high-speed Internet.
- Canadian cellphone data plan rates are the highest or among the highest in the world and are completely unaffordable for people living on social assistance.
- There is no increase in social assistance rates or implementation of a digital access benefit to help cover the costs of digital access or to provide digital literacy training.
- Digital and remote tribunal hearings add a barrier to communication in cases where translation and interpretation are required.
- Through the increased use of remote hearings and digital tools, clinics and clients are being impacted by the cost of digitization.

**Digitization can act as a barrier to accessing social assistance**

**Digital access is an access to justice issue**

**Online-only creates communication barriers and doesn't support language translation and interpretation needs!**



# FIX MODERNIZATION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE (1)

## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RENEWAL

**What you can do:** Ask to raise social assistance rates significantly and immediately, and to end the punitive rules.

- The Province is undergoing a once-in-a-generation overhaul from 2020-2024 that changes social assistance delivery.
- Social assistance delivery remains with Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.
- Decisions about eligibility and amount of benefits will mostly be removed from local offices and made centrally by the Province.
- Municipalities or Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)/District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) will no longer administer financial assistance but will focus on “stability support” services.
- There is centralization of the phone system and of the application to the Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA).
- There is Automation with risk-based eligibility determinations via third-party credit reporting with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and Equifax.
- There is an increased use of digital tools via the online communication portal, MyBenefits.
- Co-design is occurring between the province and municipalities/CMSMs/ DSSABs only, and not with clients.

## MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW PLAN

**What you can do:** Ask to halt the modernization process until the rollout thus far is studied, the findings are made public, and consultation with clients occurs. Ask for transparency of the funding models and for funding for new wraparound services.

Under the new plan:

- Social assistance rates (frozen since 2018 despite 11% inflation) are not going to go up.
- There are still 800+ punitive rules and clawbacks for social assistance clients.
- There will be less face-to-face interaction in the application process.
- People will lose direct access to caseworkers because of the centralized phone system.
- Funding for digital access for cellphones, computers, data and Internet plans, and digital literacy training is completely missing from the plan.
- There is no plan for additional funding for “stability supports” or wraparound services (supports for childcare, disability, food security, housing, literacy and language learning, mental health and addiction, settlement, training, etc.)
- There's no way for the public to know if or how this new plan will be helpful and successful because there are no clear metrics for success.
- There is no indication that access to social assistance will be broadened to include people with precarious immigration status.
- There was a major lack of broad consultation with social assistance clients before the changes were put into place.
- There is no transparent and supportive funding model between the province and municipalities/CMSMs/DSSABs.

**Social assistance rates must be increased significantly and immediately!**

**Include meaningful consultation and co-design with clients!**

**Social assistance must be an accessible, integrated, responsive, comprehensive and uncomplicated service model to support Ontario's most vulnerable!**



# FIX MODERNIZATION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE (2)

## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TRANSFORMATION

**What you can do:** Ask to raise social assistance rates significantly and immediately, and to end the punitive rules.

- Employment services for Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) have been separated out from the rest of the social assistance system. Employment services for clients has become part of Employment Ontario.
- These supports are now overseen by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.
- New Service System Managers (SSMs) are chosen to oversee employment service providers.
- SSMs are selected through a bidding process and can be a private company, a non-profit, a public body (a municipality, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs)/District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) or a consortium (group of organizations).
- So far, WCG (a private Australia-based multinational corporation), FedCap (an American-based non-profit), a public college, and a consortium of CMSMs have won bids to do this work.
- The transformation uses a pay-per-performance model where SSMs are paid after a client is placed in a job.
- This model has been tried in Ontario, the UK and in Australia over the past 25 years. It often results in low long-term job placement rates into low-wage, precarious and contract jobs.
- A new digital questionnaire, the Common Assessment Tool (CAI) streams clients into three streams from least to most barriers to work.
- Phase 1 of the rollout has been prototyped, the SSMs for Phase 2.a have been announced, Phase 2.b and Phase 3 are forthcoming.

## MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW PLAN

**What you can do:** Ask to halt the modernization process until the rollout thus far is studied, the findings are made public, and consultation with clients occurs. Ask for more funding for pre-employment supports.

Under the new plan:

- There are no clear pathways for referral to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).
- There has been no study and assessment and making outcomes of prototypes public before continuing the rollout of other phases.
- There is no new funding for pre-employment supports (childcare, housing, training, etc.)
- No safeguards to prevent clients from getting lost in the shuffle between their social assistance caseworker and their Employment Ontario caseworker.
- It may be harder to keep services public and local under this model.
- There has been little to no consideration for people with disabilities, including the extraordinary and unique costs of living with a disability and assurance of adequate workplace accommodation for people with disabilities who can work.
- There's no way for the public to know if or how this new plan will be helpful and successful because there are no clear metrics for success.

**Stop the rollout until the plan can be studied properly!**

**Ensure people with disabilities are a core part of the plan!**

**Pay-per-performance is not the way to help support people into good jobs!**



# BETTER WAGES AND BENEFITS FOR WORKERS

## INCREASE INCOMES FOR LOW-WAGE WORKERS

**What you can do:** Demand that the minimum wage be raised to \$20 with regular annual increases that reflect the cost of living. Ask candidates if they will do so, in what time frame, and if they will maintain the indexation of the minimum wage to inflation that already exist in legislation.

- Inequality has increased dramatically during the pandemic.
- The minimum wage has barely inched up since 2018, going from \$14 to \$15 in four years. This has not kept pace with rising cost of living and is far below the rate of inflation.
- As the cost of living increases many workers are struggling to get by.
- Approximately two million workers in Ontario make less than \$20/hour.
- A majority of low-waged workers in the province are women.
- Racialized workers disproportionately occupy jobs that pay less than \$20/hour.

## EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK

**What you can do:** Ask candidates if they will support equal pay for equal work.

- Workers in Ontario need legislation to ensure equal pay, benefits, and working conditions for equal work regardless of their status as part-time, contract, or temporary workers.
- The practice of perma-temping, where employers offer repeated contracts to temp workers for lower pay, no benefits and no job security, is major problem for workers in the low-wage economy.
- Equal pay for equal work will discourage the practice of perma-temping and ensure workers have access to decent work.
- There also needs to be pay transparency in workplaces to enforce equal pay provisions. This will help ensure that workers are not left behind.
- Equal pay for equal work is a question gender and racial justice as workers who face unequal pay for equal work are disproportionately women and racialized workers.

## EVERYONE NEEDS PAID SICK DAYS

**What you can do:** Ask candidates if they will agree to implementing 10 permanent employer-paid sick days for all workers, and when they will do it.

- All workers in Ontario deserve 10 permanent, adequate, universal, seamlessly accessible and employer-paid sick days.
- 57% of all workers and 78% of low-wage workers do not have access to any paid sick days.
- Legislating paid sick days is a question of racial justice as racialized workers are less likely to have access to paid sick days.
- Workers shouldn't have to choose between going into work sick and losing their paycheque.
- Paid sick days should be seamlessly accessible. They should not require a doctor's note nor should they be accrued over time.

**Low-wage workers need a raise!**

**Paid sick days improve equity for women, people with disabilities, and racialized people**





# SUPPORT PRECARIOUS WORKERS

## MISCLASSIFICATION DEPRIVES WORKERS OF THEIR FULL RIGHTS

**What you can do:** Ask candidates if they will commit to making sure that all workers have access to their rights under the *Employment Standards Act*.

- Increasingly more workers are turning to gig work to make ends meet. But gig workers are systematically misclassified as independent contractors - which deprives them of basic employment rights.
- All workers should have access to full benefits and protections under the ESA. There should not be a separate and lesser set of labour rights for gig workers.
- The onus should be on employers to prove workers are truly independent contractors, not on misclassified workers to prove they are misclassified.
- The best and most portable benefits for gig workers are not a separate and lesser portable benefits scheme, rather it is to have access to the full rights and benefits afforded to all workers.

## MIGRANT WORKERS NEED BETTER PROTECTIONS

**What you can do:** Ask candidates if they support stronger rights for migrants workers, and better enforcement of laws that protect migrant workers.

- We need stronger rules and enforcement to protect the rights of migrant workers hired in Ontario.
- There needs to be a registry of employers that hire workers with temporary work permits, which would help reduce the demand for unlicensed recruiters and make enforcement easier.
- Employers of foreign nationals must be jointly and severally liable with recruiters for compliance under the *Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act* (EPFNA). There should be stiffer penalties for employers and recruiters who violate the rules.
- Migrant workers must be able to make anonymous complaints of any violations of the licensing regime. The burden of proof for violations should be on employers not on workers.

**All workers  
deserve full rights,  
protections, and  
benefits!**



# INVEST IN LEGAL AID

## CUTBACKS HURT CLINIC CLIENTS

What you can do: Ask candidates to increase the Province's financial commitment to Legal Aid Ontario to \$480 million annually.

- In 2019, the provincial government cut funding to Legal Aid Ontario by 30%. This decreased access to legal services through community clinics for low-income and vulnerable Ontarians.
- Funding is needed for increased demand for translation and interpretation services.
- Indigenous clients who represent 3% of Ontario's population, but 14% of Legal Aid Ontario clients, are disproportionately impacted.
- Over 50% of clients served by legal clinics have a mental or physical disability.
- The Law Foundation of Ontario's contribution dropped by 75% because of the pandemic, worsening the funding problem.
- For every \$1 spend in Legal Aid Funding, the rate of return is between \$9 and \$16.

**Low-income Ontarians including Indigenous people, people with disabilities, racialized people and people with precarious immigration status need access to justice!**



**INCOME SECURITY ADVOCACY CENTRE**  
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