

**For Immediate Release**

**Monday, July 25, 2022**

## **Over 230 Organizations from Across Ontario Call on Premier Ford to Double Social Assistance Rates**

TORONTO – Social service providers and community groups from across the province are calling on Premier Ford to double Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates ahead of the release of the August Budget.

The signatories, which include shelters, food banks, community legal clinics, settlement service providers, mental health providers, racial and gender justice organizations, disability rights advocates, injured worker clinics, social service providers, labour representatives, and many others, are calling for action now.

“This is a province-wide crisis which has been years in the making,” says Melinda Ferlisi, Executive Director of the Income Security Advocacy Centre (ISAC). “My hope is that Premier Ford will see this groundswell of support across regions and support sectors and that he will do right by the people of Ontario by doubling the rates now.”

The issue of raising the rates gained attention during the June 2022 election, when all parties shared promises to increase the rates if elected. Post-election, Premier Ford confirmed that a 5% increase to ODSP rates would be included in the upcoming August Budget, but advocates have said that this is not enough. A single person living on OW receives \$733 a month, and a single person living on ODSP receives \$1,169 a month.

“When ODSP started in 1998, a person with disabilities would receive \$930 a month, which would be around \$1,467 adjusted for inflation today. The rates have not kept up with inflation though. Today that same person receives \$1,169,” says Dr. Talveer Mandur, a physician and member of Health Providers Against Poverty. “This is an unlivable income and pushes people into unstable living situations and homelessness. It damages their health. Raising the rates will reduce the constant stress and deadly consequences people receiving social assistance are forced to experience.”

The call to double social assistance rates follows two years of provincial underspending on OW and ODSP.

“During the pandemic, Ontario saved over \$814 million on OW and ODSP,” says Devorah Kobluk, Senior Policy Analyst at ISAC. “This money must be reinvested immediately to significantly raise social assistance rates so people don't fall into deeper poverty and people with disabilities can survive.”

The open letter notes that without a specific commitment to increase OW, the 458,000 beneficiaries on OW, the majority of whom are single and women, will continue living “in destitution”. The letter states: “By maintaining the current rate, this government bears the added cost of paying for these individuals’ interactions with shelters, hospitals, the criminal justice system, and other social services.”

“We urge the Ontario government to immediately raise OW and ODSP to address the rising cost of living and historically high levels of poverty and inequality,” says Debbie Douglas, Executive Director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. “Women fleeing violence, Indigenous and racialized people, and refugee women are among those who are disproportionately affected. As a society, we cannot and must not leave anyone behind.”