



Ontario Election 2025: Income Security Questions for Political Candidates

During the election period, we need to hear from all candidates about the issues we care about. The [Income Security Advocacy Centre](#) (a non-partisan, not-for-profit specialty community legal clinic) has developed the following questions and sent a copy of them to all four major political parties with candidates running in the 2025 provincial election. We plan to publicize all of the responses we receive, but while we wait for responses, we encourage you to ask your candidates these questions.

How to use this document: The preamble ahead of the question is meant to provide some data and helpful facts you can use when speaking to candidates, but don't be afraid to speak from the heart on any of these issues. Find a list of candidates in your area on the Elections Ontario website [here](#). Bring this doc with you to your local debate, save it on your phone for when you get a call from a candidate, keep it nearby in case a canvasser knocks on your door.

Ontario Works

Since 2018, OW rates have remained frozen at a maximum of \$733 per month for single Ontarians considered employable, even as the cost of essential goods and services has increased by 20 per cent over the same timeframe. Ontario is the [only province](#) in the country not to have increased its social assistance rates for single individuals over the last seven years. The annual OW income for single adults leaves them \$19,970 below Canada's Official Poverty Line (the Market Basket Measure, or MBM), and \$12,778 below the deep poverty line in [2023](#). OW rates for individuals include a maximum basic needs allowance of \$343 and a maximum shelter allowance of \$390 per month, making it impossible for recipients to attain any meaningful degree of stability which is a necessary precursor to employment and self-sufficiency.

Question 1: Will your party raise Ontario Works rates and index the rates to inflation?

Ontario Disability Support Program

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates are currently indexed to inflation, which resulted in a \$60 increase in the monthly amount for a single Ontarian with disabilities in 2024. However, a recent ISAC survey found that over 55 per cent of ODSP recipients reported no noticeable improvement to their ability to afford the necessities of life. The difference between the total welfare income of a person with disabilities and the MBM in Ontario was \$11,727 in [2023](#), and it remained nearly the same in 2024. ODSP recipients are often unable to work and are reliant on ODSP to cover all of their bills, including additional costs associated with disability.

Question 2: What specifically will your party do to support people with disabilities to live a life without poverty? In addition to raising ODSP rates, what else will you do?

Canada Disability Benefit for Ontarians with Disabilities

The upcoming Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) has brought new hope to low-income Ontarians and Canadians with disabilities. The federal government promised to begin sending payments of a maximum of \$200 per month to eligible Canadians from July 2025. Currently, Ontario claws back OW and ODSP for several federal benefits, including Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan Disability. These clawbacks deprive low-income Ontarians, including persons with disabilities, from availing themselves of the full range of Canadian income benefits. A clawback on the already inadequate CDB, will defeat the purpose of the CDB and deprive Ontarians with disabilities of the income security they rightfully deserve.

Question 3: Will your party commit to not clawing back social assistance for those who receive the Canada Disability Benefit once it is implemented?

Social Assistance and Housing

Low social assistance rates are closely linked with the ongoing housing crisis. The shelter allowance rate for both OW and ODSP has not kept up with the incredibly high cost of rental housing, leading individuals to live in unsafe, overcrowded conditions, often living only one renovation away from becoming permanently homeless. This problem is furthered by the fact that OW and ODSP clients without fixed addresses do not receive the shelter allowance portion of their social assistance income. The shelter allowance amounts to a maximum of \$390 for a single OW recipient and \$582 for a single ODSP recipient. Clients in rent-geared-to-income housing also do not receive the full shelter allowance. Eliminating different shelter rates based on housing situations and introducing a fair flat-rate system for social assistance can help people afford stable and permanent housing.

Question 4: What is your party's position on providing an equitable flat-rate structure for social assistance income support?

Poverty Reduction

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2020-2025 will be up for renewal this year. The current poverty reduction strategy does not have specific, time-bound targets for poverty reduction. The main goal of the strategy is to get more social assistance recipients to move into employment. Meanwhile, poverty rates in the province have increased, along with food bank usage and homelessness. The current strategy risks pushing social assistance recipients, including persons with disabilities, single parents, women, and newcomers towards employment while neglecting the importance of life stabilizing supports such as ensuring affordable childcare, training programs, and other supports. Pushing individuals off of social assistance does not necessarily mean they will be free from the systemic barriers preventing access to employment, housing and healthcare.

Question 5: In your view, what is missing from current efforts to reduce poverty in Ontario? How will your party meaningfully and permanently reduce poverty?

Adequate Funding for Social Assistance

Ontario is nearing the completion of several major administrative changes to the way social assistance is delivered. These changes prioritize digitalization and centralization of the system. Under the new process, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is taking over eligibility decisions and financial administration of social assistance, while the municipalities provide casework support and connect clients to local “life stabilization” services. While the other changes have mostly been put into place, life stabilization assistance is not being delivered yet. Life stabilization refers to support services related to housing, mental health, addiction counselling, and domestic violence support, among others, for social assistance recipients. These support services are essential for well-being and to ensure that recipients are employment-ready. Without these supports, social assistance recipients are at a significant risk of being pushed into the labour market before they are ready, leading to a high rate of return to social assistance programs.

Question 6: Will your party provide comprehensive and adequately funded life stabilization services for current and future social assistance recipients?

Privatization of Employment Ontario Services

Ontario’s social assistance modernization process also involves an Integrated Employment Services (IES) model that contracts out employment services for social assistance recipients to third-party Service System Managers (SSMs). SSMs are primarily private organizations selected through a bidding process. An [evaluation report](#) of IES’s pilot phase found the performance-based funding model rewards employment placement and retention, resulting in SSMs ignoring social assistance clients with barriers to employment, including persons with disabilities. There are also concerns about [less funding and subsidies](#) for recipients’ employment support than in the past model and the extent to which the [funding is reaching](#) the intended recipients. Timely and transparent disclosure of information obtained from the SSMs, and publicly released updates on how these new systems are working, is critical to ensure that the vulnerable jobseekers are not falling through the cracks during this system change.

Question 7: How will your party ensure that vulnerable people looking for job support will not fall through the cracks? What will you do to ensure transparency and accountability of taxpayer funding for this newly privatized system?

Equal Pay for Equal Work

There is a lack of legislation in Ontario supporting equal pay, good benefits, and working conditions for all workers, 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 a major problem for workers in the low-wage economy. Low-wage workers who take on gig work are also systematically misclassified as independent contractors, which deprives them of basic employment rights. Low-wage, precarious, and gig workers, most of whom are women, racialized people, people with disabilities, and students, are hit the hardest by lack of pay transparency, misclassification, and lack of enforcement of existing employment protections.

Question 8: Will your party enact legislation to ensure equal pay for equal work and better enforcement of the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*? How else will your party ensure that Ontario workers will be treated fairly?

Paid Sick Days

Under Ontario's *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, an Ontario worker is not entitled to any paid sick leave from their employer and is only eligible for three unpaid leave of absences per year to recover from illness or injury. ISAC's recent survey shows almost 70 per cent of social assistance recipients who work do not have access to any paid sick days and 55 per cent had to work despite illness, as their employer did not provide paid sick leave days. Legislated paid sick days are not only a public health measure, but also a mechanism to ensure income and employment security, as well as racial, gender, disability, and economic justice for Ontarians.

Question 9: Will your party introduce 10 days of employer-provided paid emergency leave for all Ontario workers?

Minimum Wage

Ontario's current minimum hourly wage, \$17.20, remains inadequate compared to the cost of living in the province. In 2024, the living wage, calculated as the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses such as food, clothing, shelter and community participation, was [\\$26](#) in the Greater Toronto Area. This is \$8.80 more than the current provincial hourly minimum wage. The current minimum wage is considerably below the living wage in all regions of Ontario by various margins. A higher minimum wage has been shown to have a positive impact on reducing wage inequality among women and racialized workers and increases productivity, job stability and food security.

Question 10: Will your party increase the minimum wage and by how much?

Criminalization of Poverty

A series of Bills were introduced towards the end of 2024 which were described as helping to solve the homeless crisis and "[restore public order](#)". This includes the *Safer Streets, Stronger Communities Act, 2024* which received Royal Assent in early December 2024. Among other things, the *Act* ends funding for safe consumption sites across the province in March 2025, and places restrictions on the opening of new sites, effectively ending widespread access to harm reduction services. Ending access to harm reduction and overdose prevention services in the middle of a toxic drug crisis which claims the lives of several Ontarians daily will result in more avoidable deaths and increased medical and mental health crises among the most vulnerable in our province. Bills 238 and 242, which followed the *Act*, would further criminalize houseless people.

Question 11: Will your party support widespread harm reduction services and repeal unconstitutional legislation that criminalizes houseless and street-involved people?

