

Growing Stronger Together



Ontario's Poverty Reduction Plan

Because Together We Can Make a Difference

“Tackling poverty is all about showing that **we** care about one another, **we** look out for one another and **we** want everyone moving forward together.”

Premier Dalton McGuinty

Calling on all Ontarians

The McGuinty government is calling on all Ontarians to join together to tackle poverty.



Tackling poverty means providing better opportunities for low-income families.
It means strengthening our communities and our economy.
It means inspiring hope in our future.
Poverty reaches into every community — and so must the solution.
We need to hear from you to make it happen.

Visit www.ontario.ca/GrowingStronger and start making a difference today.

Vision

A special Cabinet committee has been established to make progress in the fight against poverty.

The committee will develop a focused strategy for reducing poverty, including associated indicators and targets.

The work of the committee will be guided by the following vision:

- We are committed to expanding opportunities so that all Ontarians — particularly our children — can reach their full potential.
- Real solutions put people first — we're going to build on our foundations to deliver more effective and efficient services that are tailored to the unique needs of individuals and families.
- We all have a role to play. Governments and business leaders, not-for-profit organizations, volunteers and individuals who care passionately about their communities — each holds part of the solution.
- Delivering a real, measurable poverty reduction plan is the right thing to do for our families — and it's the smart thing to do for our economy.

**There were over 540,000 single-parent families in Ontario in 2006.
82% of lone parents are single mothers.
One in five children lives in a single-parent family.**

The median age of Ontario's population is projected to rise from 38 years in 2006 to 43 years in 2031. The population of seniors 65 and over is projected to more than double from 1.6 million (12.9% of total population) in 2006 to 3.5 million (21.4% of total population) in 2031.

More than half (52.3%) of the 1.1 million newcomers who arrived in Canada during the 2001-2006 period settled in Ontario. In 2006, foreign-born individuals accounted for 28.3% of Ontario's population, the highest among the provinces.

Opportunity Matters to Us All

Ontario's population is changing ...

- The structure of families is changing — for example, there are more lone-parent families who need supports and programs that fit their needs so that they can reach their full potential.
- The population is aging — so focusing on the education of our next generation of workers will be essential in supporting our long-term prosperity.
- Immigration is increasing — new immigrants are key to both our population and labour market growth. Supporting the dreams of newcomers and embracing their skills and global experience will create opportunities for all of us.
- Publicly funded health care helps keep our workforce strong and productive. Tackling emerging public health issues and diseases like diabetes and cancer is essential to the overall vitality of our province.

Our economy is also changing ...

- A highly educated workforce is Ontario's great economic advantage.
- Technology is changing how we live and work, so education and training are critical to keeping pace.
- Good paying jobs provide a way out of poverty for individuals and families — yet globalization is increasing the competition for these jobs.

Ontarians want everyone to share in success and opportunity ...

- Reducing poverty contributes to a fairer and more inclusive society.
- Giving families the tools they need to reach their full potential means stronger communities for everyone.
- Focusing on children as a first priority is an investment in future success and prosperity.
- We all want to see individuals given the opportunity to succeed.

We need to get the most from our efforts and resources ...

- Effective partnerships between individuals, communities and governments are key to lifting more people out of poverty.
- Programs can work better for the people who need them.
- We can get better results from publicly funded programs and services.
- Poverty costs us all — this includes increased costs of social programs, as well as the lost potential that comes when people are not given the opportunity to succeed.



“The problem of poverty is bigger than us — and so is the solution. We need everyone to be involved over the long term to make a real difference.”

Deb Matthews

*Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction
Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues*

Focus on Child Poverty First

135,000 children are born in Ontario each year.

We want each and every one of them to get a healthy start to life...

... to have a safe community to grow up in

... to develop good relationships with their families, friends and community

... and to have the chance to pursue a high-quality education.

We can — and will — devote our resources to lifting families out of poverty.

But we can prevent children from ever falling into it in the first place.

That's why our plan will focus on child poverty first.

Because when we prevent kids from falling into poverty, we are breaking the cycle of poverty.

We're sowing the seeds of prosperity for generations to come.

But it all depends on providing opportunity today.

It means giving parents the tools they need to build better lives for their kids.

It means giving young people the opportunities they need to succeed.

“Programs like the Ontario Child Benefit show our government's commitment to expanding opportunities for children and families.”

Dwight Duncan

Minister of Finance

Making a Difference Already

The Ontario government has a broad range of programs and services that have had a direct impact on reducing poverty — from affordable housing initiatives to child care assistance.

Here are some of the programs and services that are already making a difference:

The Ontario Child Benefit

A family with two children under 18 and income of \$20,000 or less will be getting an extra \$100 a month beginning in July 2008. That will grow to about \$180 a month — \$1,100 a child per year — when the benefit is fully implemented in July 2011.

The groundbreaking Ontario Child Benefit removes barriers to opportunity by providing much-needed money for kids in low-income families. 460,000 families are expected to receive monthly cheques starting in July 2008.

Child Care

A family with a net income of \$20,000 is eligible for a full subsidy to cover the cost of regulated child care in Ontario. Child care is a fundamental early learning program as it gives young children a strong start in life. It is also key to helping hard-working parents balance the demands of work and family.

Working with municipalities, which manage child care locally, Ontario created 22,000 new child care spaces between 2004 and 2007. This was done despite the current federal government's cancellation of the \$1.9-billion Early Learning and Child Care Agreement that Ontario signed in 2005.

Early Learning

Ontario has committed to moving forward on full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds. An Early Learning Advisor is developing recommendations on the best way to implement this program, starting in 2010.

The implementation of the full-day program will be closely integrated with the poverty reduction plan. Early learning helps children get the best possible start to life. It also frees up much-needed time and money for hard-working parents.



The Best Start Plan

Ontario's Best Start Plan is designed to make sure that children are ready to learn by the time they start Grade One. The plan includes:

- The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program that gives families with new babies information on parenting and child development from before birth up to age six
- More opportunities for high quality, affordable early learning and child care
- Parenting programs in Ontario Early Years Centres
- An infant hearing program for children who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Speech and language therapy for children who need extra help
- Services for children who are blind or have low vision

“Expanding opportunity for hard-working families is all about building a healthy, more caring, compassionate — and prosperous — province.”

George Smitherman

Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Education

There may be no better poverty reduction strategy than a strong, publicly funded education system.

The Ontario government is working to ensure our youngest students are getting the support they need for a solid foundation in reading, writing and math. Since 2003, Grade 3 and 6 student results have improved by nearly 10 percentage points on provincial tests.

Every student should have the same opportunity to be successful and graduate from high school. That's why the Ontario government introduced the Student Success Program that focuses on high-quality programs, course options and individualized one-on-one support. The result — since 2003-04 the graduation rate in Ontario has increased from 68 per cent to 75 per cent.

Ontario recently announced an expanded Student Nutrition Program that delivers nutritious meals and snacks to children and youth in schools and community settings across the province. Students who get nutritious meals arrive better prepared to learn, and that means that they are better prepared to succeed.



Almost 900,000 working age Ontarians do not have a high school education.

(Statistics Canada)

www.ontario.ca/GrowingStronger

Health

A healthy start to life means having the opportunity to start learning, growing and succeeding.

Key health programs for children and youth include:

- Dental services for low-income families. The government will work with professionals and community partners to deliver prevention and treatment services for low-income Ontarians, especially children.
- A new program of publicly funded immunizations that has helped over 1.8 million kids and saved families up to \$600 per child.
- The new HPV vaccine for Grade 8 girls which will prevent future cases of cervical cancer and save parents up to \$550 per eligible girl.
- A program to provide insulin pumps and related supplies for children with diabetes, saving families up to \$8,700 per child.
- A comprehensive newborn screening program for genetic disorders is available to parents of the approximately 135,000 children born in Ontario each year.

Mental health problems are invisible barriers to success for too many Ontarians — whether it's depression, anxiety or stress. A range of programs are available in Ontario to provide much-needed support to the estimated 20 per cent of people who will face the effects of mental illness at some point in their lifetime.

Skills Training

Investing in the skills and education of our people means providing them with real opportunities for success.

Enhancing our apprenticeship system is essential to building the strong workforce Ontario needs to compete in today's economy. In Ontario, about 110,000 apprentices are learning a trade today — that's nearly 50,000 more than in 2002-03.

The 2008 Budget included an additional \$75 million to expand apprenticeships. This investment will target 32,500 new registrants annually, a 25 per cent increase, by 2011-12. It also means expanded classroom and pre-apprenticeship training, new efforts to increase program completions and support to employers to ensure job placements.

Poverty can have a profound impact on overall health. Poverty is a key factor in developing type 2 diabetes according to the *Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)*.

“Tackling poverty means investing in people so that they can develop better skills, more experience, and the confidence to succeed.”

Jim Watson

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Minimum Wage Increases

Hard-working Ontarians are earning a general minimum wage of \$8.75 an hour as of March 31, 2008. Consecutive annual increases of 75 cents onwards will bring the wage to \$10.25 by 2010.

Ontario's minimum wage was stuck at \$6.85 for nine years (1995-2004). Since then, the government has brought in annual increases to ensure that Ontario families can benefit from a better standard of living.

Affordable Housing

Through a range of programs, many low-income families are provided with the financial support to find a safe, healthy, affordable place to call home. Housing is more than shelter — it provides stability, security and dignity. It creates a strong base from which to find a job, raise a family and contribute to a community.

Working in partnership with the federal and municipal governments over the past five years, Ontario now provides 35,000 new housing allowances and funds more than 18,000 new units of affordable housing. The 2008 Budget included an additional \$100 million to rehabilitate about 4,000 existing social housing units, including energy efficiency improvements.

The government will also be developing a long-term strategy for affordable housing that is closely aligned with the poverty reduction plan. The plan will include a mix of non-profit, co-operative housing and creative financial options.

“Giving our most vulnerable families the opportunity to succeed leads to a better quality of life for all Ontarians.”

Madeleine Meilleur

Minister of Community and Social Services

www.ontario.ca/GrowingStronger

“Helping students unlock their true potential means giving Ontario the ability to grow and prosper for generations to come.”

John Milloy

Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

Social Assistance

Ontario's two social assistance programs — Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program — provide a wide range of employment supports designed to meet the needs of recipients.

Ontario increased social assistance rates by seven per cent between 2004 and 2007. The 2008 Budget introduced a further two per cent rate increase.

Ontario has been working to break down the barriers that keep people from employment. For example, simplified rules around earnings exemptions mean that the more you work, the more money you keep. Drug, dental and vision care benefits have also been extended for people leaving social assistance for employment.

Newcomers

Ontario welcomes the 130,000 newcomers who arrive in this province each year with a range of settlement programs to help them settle quickly and find work.

In 2006, Ontario passed a law to level the playing field — the first of its kind in Canada — requiring Ontario's regulated professions to ensure their licensing processes are fair, clear, open and timely. The law:

- Establishes the Office of the Fairness Commissioner to assess registration and licensing practices and ensure compliance.
- Creates Global Experience Ontario, a one-stop information and resource centre helping people navigate the complex systems when seeking to enter regulated professions, and promoting internships and mentoring programs.

Ontario also supports bridging programs that help newcomers get their licence or certificate in their profession or trade so that they can work in their field of expertise sooner.

Ontario is also expanding English- and French-as-a-second language courses, which provide occupational-specific language training to help newcomers get the workplace language training they need to work and succeed in their field.

We are making a difference today, but things can be even better tomorrow.

We Can Make Things Better

We can make our existing programs work better for children and families.

We can ensure that programs are built to make sense for the people who need them.

This means tailoring services to the unique needs of individuals and families.

It means simplifying the process by which families access these services.

As we work together to develop these solutions, we will be guided by the following principles:

- **Shared responsibility:** Reducing poverty is a shared responsibility. The provincial, federal and municipal governments as well as the broader public and private sectors have a major role to play in reducing poverty. For each opportunity identified, the strategy will consider what organizations are best positioned to take action.
- **Community action:** We need to harness the unused or under-used resources in communities, including volunteers and social networks. The strategy will take steps to connect people with opportunities for action. The strategy will embrace the unique needs and solutions required in individual communities — this will not be a “one size fits all” approach.
- **Wrap-around services:** Current service delivery does not take sufficient account of program interaction and complex needs. The strategy will work to break down silos and will contain initiatives to shift to a person-centred approach.
- **Evidence-based decision making:** We need to objectively show the connection between components of the strategy and credible sources of research and data to support outcomes.
- **Social innovation and entrepreneurship:** This refers to the use of entrepreneurial principles to organize, create and manage a venture to make social change. The strategy will identify successful examples linked to priority areas and make targeted investments.

“Reducing poverty means supporting our families so that parents can build a better future for their children.”

Kathleen Wynne

Minister of Education

Questions for Discussion

The answers to these questions will help us move forward with a plan that delivers more opportunities for success and a decent standard of living to all Ontario families.

1. Given that our first priority is children and their families, how can we do a better job with existing resources to improve opportunities for children living in poverty?
2. What new ideas could we incorporate into our existing supports that would increase opportunities for children living in poverty?
3. We know that communities are best positioned to understand and respond to the local realities of poverty and opportunity. What is already working in your community to support children, youth and their families living in poverty to achieve their potential?
4. We know that to be successful we must all work together. How can we better integrate the roles that we all play — individuals, not-for-profits, the private sector, volunteers and all levels of government — in increasing opportunity for Ontarians living in poverty?
5. We are focusing on children first, but we will develop a comprehensive, long-term poverty reduction strategy for all people living in poverty. What are the key long-term goals for improving opportunity with respect to groups other than children?
6. We need to be able to measure our progress on poverty reduction. What measures do you think will best show our progress in improving opportunity for Ontarians living in poverty?

Help us answer these questions.

Make your opinion matter.

Make sure your voice is heard.

Together, we can help families get ahead.

Together, we can help Ontario grow stronger.

Together, we can make a difference.

Visit www.ontario.ca/GrowingStronger

To have your say, please visit:
www.ontario.ca/GrowingStronger
or write to:

Growing Stronger Together

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Your privacy is important to us and we are committed to protecting your personal information. All personal information you choose to provide on this form is collected in compliance with section 38(2) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. The information will be used to help develop Ontario's poverty reduction strategy. Questions can be directed to the Executive Coordinator, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Strategy and Results Branch, Cabinet Office, (416) 212-4129, Whitney Block, Room 6527, 99 Wellesley St. W., Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1.