

Analysis of Ontario Government Statements and Potential Implications for Community Services ¹		
Issue	Ontario Government Statement ²	Analysis /Potential Implications
Employment and Financial Supports		
Employment Services	Develop new Second Career strategy to the Rapid Re-employment and Training Service to help Ontarians who have suffered job loss. The annual cost is \$25 million.	More information is required if this could provide additional supports to York Region residents. The Rapid Re-employment and Training Service to date appears targeted to communities that have experienced large plant closures or job losses.
Child Benefits	Through the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) provide up to \$1,100 per child to lower income families.	Re-affirms 2007 Ontario Budget plan to incrementally raise the value of the new OCB to \$1,100 by 2011. The OCB will be fully funded by the province. Many income security advocacy groups have asked that the roll-out to the full OCB value be accelerated.
Employment Insurance (EI)	Demand an overhaul of the federal EI system, which currently provides Ontarians with less support than Canadians in other provinces.	More information is required if the proposal calls for the end of the current system of regionally-defined EI eligibility and benefits. Note that the low level of EI coverage for GTA workers relative to other areas of Canada has been a key issue for many income security advocates. This can result in additional pressures on Ontario Works for York Region residents who are unemployed and facing financial crisis but unable to access EI for income or training supports. Changes to EI could potentially improve access for unemployed workers in Ontario, including York Region, but would require analysis of specific proposals and the type of workers, employment relationships, and industry/sectors prevalent in York Region to assess. More information will also be needed on whether EI reform is a federal priority – an overhaul would require federal policy change and could have implications on EI recipients living in other provinces.

¹The analysis is focused on programs and services provided through the following branches of the Community and Health Services department: Employment and Financial Support, Family and Children's Services, and Housing Services.

² Includes positions from party platform, related fiscal plan, and other campaign announcements or responses to election surveys. Pre-election announcements, including the 2007 Ontario Budget, are not included unless part of the platform or where noted to clarify a platform statement.

Family and Children's Services

Early Learning and Care	Appoint an Early Learning Advisor to advise the Premier on developing and funding a full-day pre-school program. The annual cost is \$300 million for early learning and full day preschool.	More information is required on the definition and scope of a "full-day, pre-school" program to assess implications for York Region child care services and Best Start initiatives. However, depending on the design of the program, there could be a significant impact on the cost of child care spaces and therefore, subsidies.
Autism Services	Provide \$10 million to prepare schools to deliver Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapy on-site.	More information is required on how this will impact service capacity and levels in York Region.
Supports to At-Risk Youth	Create teams of social workers, youth workers and police to work with at-risk students. Raise high school graduation rate to 85% by 2010 by providing special support for at-risk students and a new specialized school for adult learners to finish high school. The annual cost is \$110 million. Expand Pathways to Education program to "give more students from at-risk neighbourhoods a fair shot at success."	Completion of high school is a key program objective for Ontario Works LEAP (Learning, Earning and Parenting) participants. Additional supports for at-risk students may improve outcomes depending on the type of supports provided and the level of funding made available to students living in York Region.
Other Supports	Expand Family Literacy Centres across the province.	These centres are school-based programs for children 0-6 years to improve school readiness through play-based activity, provide social interaction and access to multi-lingual reading resources, and link families to appropriate community resources for special needs, health and other related services. The centres are free. 89 are currently operating. None appear to be located in York Region. More information is needed on program criteria to assess if expansion would include York Region schools and if these centres are linked to Early Years Centres or Best Start initiatives. The program is funded through the Ministry of Education.

Housing Services

Affordable Housing	Create a long-term strategy for affordable housing. The strategy will contain a mix of non-profit and co-operative housing and will take advantage of creative financial options.	More information is needed on how this could address affordable housing needs in York Region, particularly if a long-term funding commitment from the province is included to build new units and sustain existing ones.
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Programs and Policy Issues Related to Community Services

Poverty Reduction Strategy	Build a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy around the Ontario Child Benefit working with partners to develop indicators and targets to measure and address child poverty. Firm targets will be introduced within one year.	The 2007 Ontario Budget Plan included a number of anti-poverty initiatives, such as the new Ontario Child Benefit, incremental increases to the minimum wage, and a 2% increase to social assistance rates. Developing a poverty reduction strategy with hard targets for reducing child poverty (e.g., 25% reduction within 5 years – Campaign 2000) has been a key plank for many income security advocacy groups in the run-up to the provincial election; however, many have also included calls for more investments to meet these targets, such as adjustments to OW and ODSP rates to reflect the real costs of living and quicker implementation of the OCB and minimum wage increases.
Provincial-Municipal Relationship	Upload full cost of both the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) over four years, relieving over \$900 million per year from local property tax payers.	Reaffirms the Liberal Government's recent regulatory change to upload ODSP and ODB costs. The Provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review is still expected to report by the spring 2008 on other issues under review. ODSP and ODB uploading will result in reductions to the Regional operating budget of about \$22.4 million by 2011, although most of this will be realized in 2010 and 2011 (Report No. 7 of the Finance and Administration Committee to Regional Council Meeting of September 27, 2007). The uploaded costs for 2008 include ODB expenditures that are currently cost-shared 20% by municipalities for OW clients.
Recreation	Provide tax incentives to encourage Ontarians to stay active, including tax credits for families with children enrolled in organized physical activities. Create an Ontario Fitness Challenge program to fight childhood obesity.	Tax incentives could be linked to the new federal tax program designed for similar purpose. If set-up as a non-refundable tax credit, the program would be less effective in providing incentives for low income families who do not have income tax payable. More information is required to assess if new fitness program would make funds available for community-based programs.

Dental Services	First step of the poverty reduction strategy is to support dental services for low income Ontario families. The annual cost is \$45 million. See Attachment 2 on implications for Health Services.	More information is required on program design and eligibility to assess benefits to York Region residents, as well as how it may relate to dental services already provided to children and adults receiving Ontario Works. Unclear on which service platform would be used to manage and deliver the program (e.g. through Municipal Service Managers and Public Health units). A Liberal Party news release indicates that the program would be designed to target the working poor, who often lack adequate dental coverage. Expanding health and dental coverage to low income workers and their families is seen by many income security advocacy groups as a key factor in improving health, employability, and employment outcomes.
Proposals that Impact Community Services Clients, Supports, & Related Human Services		
Asset-based Programs for Low Income Ontarians	Join with financial institutions to create a new program to help low income Ontarians build equity and save for home purchases, education, or business development.	Asset-based programs are increasingly seen by some social policy advocates as part of the anti-poverty tool-box to help low income families and individuals better manage economic risk. There have been several pilots developed in Canada based on US and other models. The Canada Learning Bond is an example of where this type of program is already in place. More information is required on how the proposed program would intersect with needs-tested programs delivered by Community and Health Services.
Violence Against Women	Build on domestic violence plan by restoring funding levels for shelters to pre-1995 levels.	More information needed to assess revenue impact for York Region's two transitional housing operations for women fleeing domestic violence.
Supports to Seniors	Provide financial supports for those caring for elderly family members. The annual cost is estimated at \$70 million. Create a new homeowners grant for seniors who have trouble paying their property tax. The annual cost is \$250 million. Develop easy-to-access basket of services to help seniors to stay in their own homes. See Attachment 2 on implications for Health Services.	Clarification is required on how financial supports to caregivers will be delivered (e.g. through existing tax credits) and the level of support provided to low and moderate income families. According to a Liberal Party news release, the proposed homeowner grant will be up to a maximum of \$500 for low and moderate income seniors. Single seniors who own their own homes will qualify for a grant if their income is less than \$50,000 a year. Those with \$35,000 or less income will receive the full grant of \$500. The qualifying levels for senior couples will be less than \$60,000 of joint income. Couples with less than \$45,000 will receive the full grant. More analysis will be required of program design and implementation as well as York Region housing/income data to assess how many senior residents could potentially qualify. Note that there is already a provincial refundable property tax credit for low to moderate income people, including seniors. More information is required to

		clarify how this will intersect with a new homeowner grant program. Note that the Liberal government recently announced an Aging@Home Strategy, which provides \$700 million over three years to expand community living options for seniors. A large portion of the funding has been allocated to LHINs to develop services that meet local needs. This could provide opportunities to expand supportive housing services for seniors, including those living in social and affordable housing units.
Employment Standards	Increase the minimum wage to \$10.25 by 2010.	Reaffirms 2007 Ontario Budget plan to raise the minimum wage incrementally by 2010. Income security advocacy groups have called for an immediate increase to \$10.00 and annual adjustments to the cost of living.
Education	Increase ESL funding by 18% (\$26 million in annual funding) and special needs funding by 8% (\$144 million). Expand after-school homework help and introduce on-line homework help. The annual cost is \$43 million.	Increased ESL funding could provide additional school-based resources to support the integration of recent immigrant families in York Region.
Community Use of Schools	Double funding for community use of schools program.	The platform indicates that this will provide space for after-school activities that is affordable for all Ontario families and free in communities that need it most. The program provides funding to school boards to lower or eliminate fees charged to community groups for use of school space after hours.
Post-Secondary Education (PSE) and Training	Initiatives include: • Provide a new textbook and technology grant of \$300 per student. The annual cost is \$170 million. • Provide parents with a grant at the beginning of the school year instead of waiting for PSE tax credit payable at the end of the year. • Work with federal government to provide students with twice as much time before starting to repay student loans. • Work with college and non-profit sectors to design and deliver an adult literacy curriculum. • Increase new apprenticeships by 25% (\$50 million annually).	More information is needed on how new grant programs would work with existing tuition and education-related tax credits, student financial aid, and income support programs to assess benefits to lower and moderate income families with college/university-aged children. Clarification is required on whether the proposed new adult literacy curriculum will be linked to additional resources for improving existing service capacity in York Region, particularly for services accessed by Ontario Works participants engaged in pre-employment training or who face barriers to employment due to literacy skills. Apprenticeships provide additional training options for unemployed or underemployed residents in York Region, including Community and Health Services clients, to improve their employment outcomes and respond to local labour market needs for skilled workers.

<i>Immigrant Integration and Settlement Supports</i>	Initiatives include: • Create Opportunities Ontario Program to speed up immigration process for highly skilled professionals and international students. • Create International Ontario Strategy to attract skilled people from around the world. • Create new Orientation Ontario course supported by a call centre to assist newcomers with follow-up support. • Expand Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to include books, language courses and bridging programs to help newcomers upgrade their skills. • Concentrate services in public schools located in neighbourhoods with high newcomer populations. • Expand Ontario Public Services' internship program seven-fold and expand support for mentoring partnerships with the private sector.	Initiatives to support the early integration of newcomers could benefit a growing part of York Region's population. More information is required to assess the impact of specific proposals for York Region (e.g., Which services would be located into public schools? How can York Region employers become more involved in mentorship programs? What types of supports would be linked to the Orientation Ontario course and to what extent would regional or municipal information be included as part of the course curriculum?).
<i>Mental Health</i>	Continue to enhance mental health and addictions services with increased funding and strong provincial policy direction. See Attachment 2 on implications for Health Services.	Could provide additional resources to community mental health agencies serving Community and Health Services clients in need of support depending on how dollars are allocated regionally. More information is required to assess how provincial policy direction will be developed and impact on local service capacity and delivery.
<i>Social Service Expenditures</i>	Children's and Social Services spending will increase by \$1.3 billion – from \$11 billion in 2008 to \$12.3 billion in 2012.	The costing includes implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit, progress towards a new full day pre-school program, dental services for low income Ontarians, and other social service and housing investment.