

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z1

January 25, 2024

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services is a multiservice charitable organization with services across the City of Toronto – child care, home care, employment, housing, youth services, newcomer services, homeless services, and much more. We welcome this opportunity to share our recommendations for the 2024 Ontario budget. Our recommendations are based on engagement with low-income program participants, who have lived experience with poverty, and unemployment.

Affordable Housing:

We continue to observe a worsening housing situation for our program participants in Toronto, and increasingly people are becoming homeless. We ask you to reinstate and expand provincial rent control to all buildings in Ontario built after 2018 to stabilize the housing and lives of people, communities, and local economies. Further we ask that you continue paying revenue to the City of Toronto to make up for lost provincial development charges.

Minimum Wage:

TNGCS repeats our call to increase the provincial minimum wage, especially given rapidly rising inflation. Many of our participants are increasingly food insecure. The Daily Bread Food Bank's recent study shows one in ten working families must now use food banks. This situation would drastically improve if the Ontario Government would increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation. The Ontario Living Wage Network now puts the living wage in the GTA at over \$25 per hour.

Social Assistance:

We are pleased that Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) participants can now earn up to \$1,000 a month but echo the calls of the ODSP Action Coalition that this amount be increased to \$2,000 a month in this time of high inflation and escalating rental housing costs.

We also share the Coalition's calls for the following:

- 1) Double Ontario Works and ODSP rates. Tying ODSP benefit rates to inflation last July was a valuable step in the right direction, but rates still need to be substantially increased.
- 2) Replace the current myriad rate structures with a single flat-rate for all clients by combining the basic needs and shelter allowance into a single amount.

- 3) With food and grocery prices continuing to spiral out of control and food bank demand breaking records on a monthly basis, please provide the Special Diet Allowance for all recipients in 2024 and 2025 on top of the basic needs allowance.
- 4) Make portable housing benefits readily available to all people with disabilities receiving social assistance whose rent/mortgage is not subsidized.

Childcare:

Our organization runs eleven childcare centres across Toronto, and we hear frequently from parents who desperately need affordable childcare. Many of these parents are on long waiting lists. We understand that there are twenty-eight childcare expansions in Toronto District School Board schools alone that were given the early Ministry of Education funding in 2017. But none of these centres have been built, due to funding shortfalls, cost increases, and delays in obtaining the Ministry's approval to proceed. Costs are going up, to the point that some centres may not be built. Funding and approvals must happen in this fiscal year to serve this growing urgent need.

Health Care:

As a non-profit provider of home care and other health services, our organization hears from our low-income program participants that they need non-profit health care services open to the public and value receiving care at their local public hospital. We share their deep concern that the first private surgery clinic under this government will soon open, and we urge your government to follow the Canada Health Act and keep all health care services public. We ask that you follow the lead of both Michael Garron Hospital and Sunnybrook Health Centre in Toronto and begin offering surgeries on weekends and in the evenings employing nurses and doctors within the public system. This will result in government savings and better service for those of all income backgrounds. Ontario has the lowest per capita health care funding of any province in Canada and we can invest in our residents.

We look forward to your reply and are happy to meet with you in person to discuss our recommendations in more detail. We are happy to offer you a tour of our services and the chance to speak to our program participants directly. You can contact me at ceo@tngcs.org

Sincerely,



Bill Sinclair, CEO