

2020 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission



About Daily Bread Food Bank

Daily Bread Food Bank distributes close to 11 million pounds of food annually to more than 130 member agencies across Toronto. Daily Bread works to end hunger and support individuals living on low incomes who are experiencing food insecurity.

Recommendations for 2020 Budget

We share in the government's belief that people are Ontario's biggest asset – but Ontarians are struggling to get ahead. In the past year, food bank visits have increased by 4% in Ontario. Food bank clients are living day-to-day, unable to achieve financial stability.

Stan Neatt is one such client. Stan worked as a truck driver until he was diagnosed with a brain tumor that caused short-term memory loss. Stan receives approximately \$1,300 a month from the Ontario Disability Support Program, (ODSP), but pays \$1,200 to live in a shared apartment. With only \$100 left per month to afford basic necessities, Stan is forced to rely on food banks and is still unable to accumulate any savings. Stan is not unique in this respect – food bank clients in Toronto have a median of \$7.83 left on per day to live on after paying for housing.

We can do better. Budget 2020 is an opportunity to invest in Ontario's future. We put forward the following recommendations to build a stronger Ontario:

Make Government Smarter

1. Convene an interim advisory council to support the government in social assistance reform.

The Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly is currently reviewing Bill 60, which would establish a social assistance research commission. We strongly support this and recommend that in the immediate-term, an interim advisory council is established to guide the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services in reforming social assistance. Social assistance recipients can provide invaluable insight to improve administration and outcomes.

2. Establish a peer-navigation program for ODSP.

A peer-navigation program is a cost-effective way to support ODSP applicants and recipients navigate services and program requirements. This will reduce the administrative burden on case workers and enable them focus on providing wrap-around life stabilization supports. A peer-navigation program has the added benefit of helping prepare people for jobs by providing meaningful employment opportunities to people with disabilities.

3. Collapse basic needs and monthly shelter allowance into a standard flat rate.

Ontario Works (OW) and ODSP include separate amounts for "basic needs" and for "shelter." However, the combined maximum falls well below the cost of shelter in almost all parts of the province,ⁱ and denies necessary benefits to people with no fixed address, further preventing them from securing housing. A simplified flat rate structure will lead to administrative efficiencies.

Make Life More Affordable

4. Increase social assistance rates to reflect the cost of living.

When you cannot afford groceries or public transit, your ability to find and secure employment is hampered. To make life more affordable for Ontarians and prepare them for jobs, we recommend increasing social assistance rates to reflect the true cost of living, as measured by the Market Basket Measure, and tie rate increases to inflation.

5. Fully implement the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit.

We applaud the government for signing the first National Housing Strategy bilateral agreement with the federal government. We urge the province to act swiftly to fully implement this benefit in 2020. We recommend that the Canada-Ontario Housing benefit be made available to individuals receiving OW and ODSP without clawing back their benefits.

6. Increase the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) to reflect the cost of living.

Child benefits have been shown to successfully reduce severe food insecurityⁱⁱ and they also help make life more affordable for Ontarians. We were pleased to see OCB rates increased in 2019 to reflect inflation, and recommend that the OCB be increased annually based on the cost of living.

Build Healthier Communities

7. Maintain the existing definition of disability for ODSP eligibility.

We recommend that the government refrain from changing the definition of disability for ODSP eligibility to exclude those with episodic conditions. This change would target people struggling with mental health challenges, like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression and would undermine the government's commitment to enhancing mental health outcomes for Ontarians.

For more information, please contact:

Talia Bronstein, VP Research & Advocacy
Daily Bread Food Bank
416-203-0050 x 233
tbronstein@dailybread.ca

ⁱ Zon, N., Granofsky, T. (2019). Resetting Social Assistance Reform. Toronto, ON: Ontario 360.

ⁱⁱ Brown, E., Tarasuk, V. Money speaks: Reductions in severe food insecurity follow the Canada Child Benefit, Preventive Medicine (129)2019: 105876. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpmed.2019.105876>.