

# *2003 Ontario Election Backgrounder*

## **An Agenda for Action on Child Poverty:**

### *Where do the Parties Stand?*

This backgrounder provides information on where the three major political parties in Ontario stand on *An Agenda for Action on Child Poverty*. The backgrounder also offers a set of key questions that we invite you to ask all candidates to ensure that child poverty becomes a central issue in this election.

#### **An Agenda for Action on Child Poverty**

**Campaign 2000 calls on the next provincial government to ensure that all families can share in Ontario's collective prosperity.** Despite continued economic growth, poverty retains a stubborn hold on too many families in Ontario. At a time of prosperity 390,000 children remain in poverty in Ontario - an increase of 41% since 1989.

Tackling poverty requires a comprehensive strategy to improve labour market conditions, enhance income support programs and invest in public services. Good jobs, adequate social assistance, quality child care and affordable housing are the four pillars required for income security and the well-being of families. A system of quality, accessible education is also key to the future of Ontario.

**All Parties must to commit to a strategy that substantially reduces child and family poverty through action in 4 key areas:**

- 1. Promote jobs with good wages and working conditions.*
- 2. Provide economic security, dignity, and opportunities for training and development to families on social assistance.*
- 3. Invest in a system of quality, affordable child care services that are available to families in every community across Ontario.*
- 4. Ensure access to safe, affordable housing for families.*

**Campaign 2000** is a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of over 85 national, provincial and community organizations united in securing the implementation of the 1989 House of Commons' resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000.

For more information visit [www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca) or contact Liyu Guo at 416-595-9230/244 ([liyugu@fsatoronto.com](mailto:liyugu@fsatoronto.com))

## **Issue: High Quality Child Care**

**Benchmark:** Ontario needs a system of high quality, affordable Early Childhood Education and Care services that are available to families in every community across Ontario.

**C2000 Comments:** Regulated child care spaces meet the needs of less than 9% of children under 12 in Ontario. Ontario's spending on regulated child care has declined by more than \$160 million since 1995 (in 2002 dollars). The next provincial government must be committed to working with the federal government in delivering a new national child care plan. This will require that federal funds transferred to the provinces for child care are used for child care, with additional new provincial spending in the following years. The government must commit to regulated child care services to ensure high quality and safe standards for children. Universal, high quality, affordable child care means that every child has an equal opportunity for the best possible start in life, regardless of socio-economic status.

<b>CHILD CARE</b>	<b>Progressive Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>NDP</b>
✓ <b>Funding and New Spaces</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no commitment to funding regulated child care or to expanding access to new spaces</li> <li>▪ will use federal Early Childhood Development Transfer (ECDI) dollars to increase funding for Early Years Centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to spending all federal ECDI dollars on regulated child care and participating fully with federal government in development of national plan</li> <li>▪ committed to investing an additional \$300 million above ECDI funding to regulated child care in first mandate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to spending all federal ECDI dollars on regulated child care and participating with federal government in development of national plan</li> <li>▪ will invest an additional \$200 million above ECDI funding to regulated child care annually</li> <li>▪ will create 20,000 new, regulated, \$10 a day child care spaces in the next four years</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Quality Child Care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no commitment to expanding access to quality regulated child care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to spending new dollars on regulated spaces</li> <li>▪ will define caregivers who register with the government, undergo a background check and receive ongoing training as regulated providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to investing on regulated child care</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Affordability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no commitment to making regulated child care more affordable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ in first mandate will assist 75% of families with children under 4 years of age with child care costs based on a sliding fee according to income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to reducing fees for children 18 months to 5 years of age to no more than \$10 per day</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Vision for Child Care in Ontario</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no plans to restore funding to child care, create new spaces, increase quality and affordability or increase wages for child care providers</li> <li>▪ will create new Minister of Human Development, who will co-ordinate existing human development programs and services across ministries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ view child care as a seamless extension of our public education system.</li> <li>▪ committed to raising standards in unregulated care</li> <li>▪ will establish a College of Early Childhood Educators</li> <li>▪ will establish a new Minister dedicated to working on children's issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to creating seamless, integrated early learning programs that link child care to school</li> <li>▪ committed to expanding and protecting regulated child care</li> <li>▪ committed to pay equity for child care workers</li> </ul>

**ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:** How will your party increase high quality, affordability and access to child care services?

## **Issue: Safe, Affordable Housing**

**Benchmark:** Ontario families need access to safe and affordable housing.

**C2000 Comments:** In 1995, the province cancelled all new social housing starts. Without rent controls, rents in Ontario have continued to rise at rates faster than inflation; by 2002 the average overall rent in Ontario jumped again by 2.5% to \$815. Because social assistance and the minimum wage have not been increased since 1995, more and more families in Ontario are facing homelessness.

The next government must commit to creating a new supply of affordable housing units. Ontario should provide full matching dollars under the federal-provincial Affordable Housing Framework Agreement, in addition to new provincial funding. The next provincial government must also bring back rent controls.

<b><i>HOUSING</i></b>	<b><i>Progressive Conservative</i></b>	<b><i>Liberal</i></b>	<b><i>NDP</i></b>
✓ <b>New affordable units</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no commitment to create new affordable housing units</li> <li>▪ committed to creating <i>Shared Care Team</i>, that will have the authority to forcibly remove homeless persons off the street.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to 20,000 new affordable housing units by matching \$245 million federal contribution to Affordable Housing Program</li> <li>▪ \$100 million in shelter allowances for working families paying more than 50% of income on rent</li> <li>▪ committed to \$10 million for a provincial rent bank for those renters with short-term arrears</li> <li>▪ committed to giving municipalities the right to protect existing rental housing from unreasonable demolition or conversion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ \$536 million to municipalities for the creation of 32,000 new, affordable housing units and 11,200 supportive housing units for the homeless over the next four years.</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Rent Controls</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No commitment to restoring rent controls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to repealing the Tenants Protection Act and replacing it with legislation that protects the needs of both landlords and tenants.</li> <li>▪ committed to returning to rent controls in tight markets vacancy rates under 3%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to immediately freezing rents for two years and bringing back rent controls</li> </ul>

**ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:** Will your party create new affordable housing units and restore rent controls?

## **Issue: Good Jobs with Living Wages**

**Benchmark:** Ontario needs better policies that promote jobs with good wages and working conditions that support families.

**C2000 Comments:** Good jobs that adequately support families are a key component in reducing child poverty. However, this is not the reality for many families who work part-time, contract or seasonal jobs that are often low paying and do not offer benefits. Employment does not guarantee that a family will escape poverty. At the peak of the economic cycle in 2000, 102,000 low income children - one in four of all low income children - lived in families where at least one parent worked full time. It is also difficult for many newcomers to access employment opportunities that adequately suit their skills and knowledge, resulting in a disproportionate number of immigrant families living in poverty.

<b><i>Employment Standards</i></b>	<b><i>Progressive Conservative</i></b>	<b><i>Liberal</i></b>	<b><i>NDP</i></b>
✓ <b>Minimum wage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No commitment to raising the minimum wage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to raising the minimum wage to \$8 an hour over four years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to raising the minimum wage immediately to \$8 an hour, with continual increases each year</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Employment Standards Act</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No commitment to repealing legislation for the 60 hour work week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to reviewing the Employment Standards Act and eliminating provisions such as the 60 hour work week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to repealing the 60 hour work week legislation and to legislating overtime pay after 40 hours in one work week</li> </ul>
✓ <b>Access to trades and professions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ will require that new immigrants to Ontario settle outside the GTA and will give first priority to those who agree to settle elsewhere</li> <li>▪ will require accreditation of would be immigrants <u>before</u> coming to Ontario</li> <li>▪ will establish the accreditation process outside of Ontario and in the countries immigrants are emigrating from, rather than relying only on locally hired officials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to working with the Ontario Licensing Review Boards to identify and remove existing barriers in licensing procedures within one year</li> <li>▪ committed to working with regulatory bodies and organizations to develop fair and consistent licensing practices</li> <li>▪ committed to ensuring that a third party appeal process is put into place for professionals denied a license.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to working with accrediting bodies and tradespeople in Ontario to fairly assess international credentials</li> <li>▪ committed to providing training and workplace opportunities for skilled workers who need help meeting Ontario standards.</li> <li>▪ committed to providing more information and orientation to foreign trained professionals</li> </ul>

**ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:** How will your party improve wages and employment conditions for working families? What is your plan for promoting equitable employment opportunities for newcomers to Ontario?

## **Issue: Adequate Social Assistance**

**Benchmark:** Ontario families need a system of social assistance that provides economic security, dignity and opportunities for training and development.

**C2000 Comments:** Since social assistance rates were cut by 21.6% in 1995 there has not been any rate increase. Welfare benefits for families and children are now only 50% to 60% of what would be needed to reach the poverty line.

Ensuring that shelter allowances are enough to afford average rents would represent a significant and achievable first step in ensuring the income security of families on social assistance. The next provincial government must raise the shelter allowance portion of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program to average rent levels in each community. In addition it must increase basic needs allowances and index social assistance benefits to the cost of living. Ending the claw back of the National Child Benefit Supplement from social assistance recipients is also key to an anti-poverty strategy.

<b><i>SOCIAL ASSISTANCE</i></b>	<b><i>Progressive Conservative</i></b>	<b><i>Liberal</i></b>	<b><i>NDP</i></b>
<p>✓ <b><i>Social Assistance Rates</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to replacing welfare for children with a new Ontario Child Benefit with more money for the needs of children on social assistance</li> <li>▪ committed to increasing funding for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)</li> <li>▪ no commitment to increase social assistance rates for adults or parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to implementing annual cost of living increases to both basic allowance and shelter component of social assistance and ODSP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to increasing the shelter allowance component of social assistance to 85% of the average rental cost within recipients community.</li> <li>▪ committed to adjusting ODSP to cost of living and social assistance annually</li> </ul>
<p>✓ <b><i>Programs and Supports</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ no commitment to review workfare program</li> <li>▪ focus on welfare fraud savings as a basis for ODSP increases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to ending the clawback of the National Child Benefit supplement</li> <li>▪ committed to improving workfare by providing more skills training and helping recipients find meaningful, long-term work</li> <li>▪ committed to strengthening the Ontarians with Disabilities Act by protecting rights and improving access to programs and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to ending the clawback of the National Child Benefit supplement</li> <li>▪ committed to expanding employment incentives to help people on social assistance move into the work force.</li> <li>▪ committed to making the ODSP application process less complicated</li> </ul>

**ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:** Does your party plan to end the clawback of the National Child Benefit? Will you increase social assistance rates to an adequate level? As a first step, will your party raise the shelter allowance portion of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program to average rent levels in each community.

**Issue: Quality, Accessible Education**

**Benchmark:** Ontario needs a public education system that addresses the wide range of children’s educational and developmental needs as well as ensuring affordable access to post-secondary studies

**C2000 Comments:** Years of funding neglect of public schools have resulted in reduced access to critical early intervention and child development programs. Since the funding formula was introduced, schools report reductions in English as a second language programs, dwindling access to support services and a reduction in resources to support the inclusion of children with special needs and children of various socio-economic backgrounds. The next government must invest in public education and improve the funding formula so that a wide range of children’s educational and developmental needs can be met.

Average fees for undergraduate programs have increased to nearly 70% since 1995 while average student debts have sky-rocketed. Low and middle income families are finding it more and more difficult to access post secondary education. The next government must be committed to removing mounting financial barriers for students.

<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>Progressive Conservative</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>NDP</b>
<p>✓ <b>Quality Public Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ promise to increase funding for education by \$2 billion</li> <li>▪ commitment to increasing funding for literacy programs, such as phonics-based reading</li> <li>▪ will allow the use of outside experts to teach/coach extra-curricular activities</li> <li>▪ committed to giving tax breaks to parents who send their children to private schools</li> <li>▪ will pass legislation making it illegal for teachers and other employees to strike during the school year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to canceling all tax credits for exclusive private schools and redirecting up to \$500 million annually to public education</li> <li>▪ will invest in new programs and initiatives such as capping class sizes at 20 students</li> <li>▪ committed to recognizing specific needs of schools in rural and urban areas and provide adequate funding</li> <li>▪ create a fair education funding model to recognize local needs of diverse communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to funding an additional \$2 billion immediately for public education</li> <li>▪ committed to reinstating full-day junior and senior kindergarten</li> <li>▪ fully implement the recommendations of the Education Equality Task Force</li> <li>▪ committed to funding International Languages and Black Heritage programs</li> <li>▪ will review curriculum to ensure that perspectives of First Nations, immigrant and communities of colour are taught in schools</li> </ul>
<p>✓ <b>Affordable Post Secondary Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ promise to invest up to \$300 million a year more in colleges and universities</li> <li>▪ committed to investing another \$400 million for student financial assistance</li> <li>▪ committed to expanding post-secondary opportunities by promoting private and internationally based institutions in Ontario</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to investing close to \$750 million in post secondary education</li> <li>▪ committed to freezing tuition fees for at least two years</li> <li>▪ committed to expanding financial assistance for students</li> <li>▪ committed to providing tuition waivers for Ontario’s neediest students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ committed to raise funding to post-secondary education to at least the national average</li> <li>▪ committed to re-regulating, freezing and reducing tuition fees at colleges and universities by 10%</li> </ul>

**ASK YOUR CANDIDATE:** What is your party’s plan to improve the quality of public education?  
 Will your party freeze or reduce fees for post secondary education?

## **Key questions for all candidates:**

1. How will your party increase high quality, affordability and access to child care services?
2. Will your party create new affordable housing units and restore rent controls?
3. How will your party improve wages and employment conditions for working families?
4. What is your plan for promoting equitable employment opportunities for newcomers to Ontario?
5. Does your party plan to end the clawback of the National Child Benefit?
6. Will you increase social assistance rates to an adequate level? As a first step, will your party raise the shelter allowance portion of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program to average rent levels in each community?
7. What is your party's plan to improve the quality of public education?
8. Will your party freeze or reduce fees for post secondary education?

## **Sources and Resources:**

Canadian Federation of Students: <http://www.cfsontario.ca>  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario: <http://www.etfo.on.ca>  
Housing and Homelessness Network in Ontario: <http://www.povnet.org/articles/HHNO.htm>  
Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition: <http://www.isarc.ca>  
Ontario Needs a Raise Coalition (Ontario Coalition for Social Justice) <http://www.ocsj.ca/>  
Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association <http://www.homelessness.on.ca/platforms.pdf>  
Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care: <http://www.childcareontario.org>  
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants: <http://www.ocasi.org>  
Ontario Federation of Labour: <http://www.ofl-fto.on.ca>  
Ontario Liberal Party Platform: <http://www.ontarioliberal.on.ca/en>  
Ontario New Democrat Party Platform: <http://www.publicpower.ca>  
Ontario Progressive Conservative Party Platform: <http://www.ontariopc.com/TheRoadAhead/contents.htm>  
Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation: <http://www.osstf.on.ca>  
Pay the Rent and Feed the Kids Campaign [www.paytherent.ca/](http://www.paytherent.ca/) & <http://dawn.thot.net/cera2.html>  
People for Education: <http://www.peopleforeducation.com>