

**Submission to the Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation 2023
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**Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change
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Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Punjabi Community Health Services
Access Alliance
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
Black Legal Action Centre
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants**

Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change works for racial equity, human dignity and social justice by helping to build community based capacity to address systemic racism, the growing racialization of poverty and the resulting increased levels of social exclusion and marginalization of racialized communities – both First Peoples and peoples of colour – in Ontario. Our steering committee is comprised of organizations from across Ontario who serve many Ontarians including racialized, refugee, im/migrant, and gender-diverse communities across different service sectors.

As Ontario continues to recover from an unprecedented period of disruption to Ontarians' lives and to various industries and services through the COVID-19 pandemic, our Province is facing new and compounding challenges—both related to coronavirus and to other sources of instability and risk. In all cases, the negative impacts of COVID-19 are staggeringly high in Black, Indigenous, and other communities of colour (collectively, “racialized communities”), as compared to the rest of the Province’s residents. In every facet of life that is potentially disrupted by COVID-19 – from health outcomes to job precarity and adequate housing – it is racialized people who bear the overwhelming brunt of the risk. Moreover, racialization has a compounding effect across all determinants of socio-economic fitness, and where race intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as gender and economic class, the hardships those populations experience are grossly magnified.

The 2021 Census found that while poverty rates for all racialized groups declined between 2015 and 2020, (with the exception of those identified as Filipino) they experienced poverty at a level that was significantly higher than the national average of 8.1 per cent. Immigrants experienced a similar decline in poverty rates, but still at a rate higher than that for Canadian-born residents. The poverty rate for refugees was almost double the rate faced by those born in Canada. (Disaggregated trends in poverty from

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the 2012 Census of Population; Statistics Canada; November 2022.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021009/98-200-X2021009-eng.cfm>) Meanwhile, the cost of basic necessities has increased astronomically in Ontario. Racialized residents, immigrants, refugees and migrants are disproportionately affected.

The Provincial government has a responsibility to all Ontario residents, and in order to meet its responsibility, its budget must factor in the following conditions:

- 1) **Poverty Eradication and The Racialization of Poverty** – the current Plan lacks action items that directly address poverty, despite clear evidence that material deprivation of basic needs and resources is linked to lower health outcomes and mortality rates over double those of individuals and neighbourhoods with material abundance.¹ The social and economic vectors of poverty, including and especially race, must be explicitly considered in all poverty reduction measures in policy and the Budget.
- 2) **Improvements to Social Assistance** – the current schema for Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) must be reviewed. The 2023 Ontario budget should:
 - a. Raise ODSP and OW entitlements to reflect the cost of living in Ontario and meet the needs of the users,
 - b. Increase the amount of allowable employment income ODSP and OW recipients may earn, enabling them to undertake work that supplements social assistance income. This takes a preventative approach to poverty by reducing financial penalties to assistance,
 - c. Invest in a more accessible appeals mechanism for all by doubling support for the Social Benefits Tribunal; and,
 - d. Ensure that all people in Ontario have access to social assistance support regardless of immigration status; as well as remove systemic administrative barriers that prevent them from accessing support.
- 3) **Direct Support for Workers** – racialized communities, particularly immigrants and refugees, experience higher rates of job loss, lower rates of pay, lower rates of retention/promotion, and misclassification as independent contractor rather than a

¹ <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/epi/2020/06/covid-19-epi-material-deprivation.pdf?la=en>

worker, and are consequently at risk of becoming more precarious than ever. The 2023 Ontario budget should include the following:

- a. Increase the minimum wage to a living wage, and index to inflation.;
- b. Improved and enhanced enforcement of the employment standards protecting workers; and
- c. Provide permanent paid sick days to all workers.
- d. End the mis-classification of workers

4) Appropriate and Affordable Housing for All – affordable housing, which was a crisis pre-COVID, has only worsened during the pandemic. Housing is a basic need. However, many residents are losing access to housing as they lose their sources of income, due to “renoviction” and “demoviction”, or as the cost of living increases without a commensurate rise in earned income or government assistance. Despite this, evictions continue to be enforced and rents remain due. Young first-time renters and recent immigrant and refugees face the biggest barriers in finding affordable, safe and liveable rental housing. Racialized people in Ontario, particularly racializing refugees, immigrant and migrants also face racism and discrimination in accessing and retaining housing. The compounding impact of the racialization of poverty and racism/discrimination leads to worse housing outcomes in these communities. The province now has the power to eliminate rental replacement bylaws as a result of the enactment of More Homes, Built Faster Act 2022 - Bill 23. Rental replacement bylaws are essential in protecting existing affordable homes. The new powers acquired by the province will erode affordable housing in Ontario's major cities (<https://acorncanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Save-Rental-Replacement-Bylaws-Dec-20-2022-.pdf>). The 2023 Ontario budget should provide:

- a. Rent relief by way of recurring subsidies for the most vulnerable in Ontario must be provided,
- b. Short-term solutions should be explored for those who are unhoused in the present, including the use of the existing unoccupied private rental units;
- c. Give more power to cities so they can enact and implement rental replacement bylaws and protect existing affordable housing;
- d. Enact rent control across the province for all rental housing; and
- a. The development of new permanent affordable housing, as well as the repair of existing units immediately.

- 5) **Improvements to the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) and Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT)** – Access to justice remains a priority, and is especially critical in areas where a person’s income or housing is in jeopardy. The shift towards less accessible hearing models, issue backlog and overall reduction of facilities has been especially deleterious to Ontario’s most vulnerable residents. Many racialized communities also face language and technology barriers in accessing Ontario’s tribunals. The 2023 Ontario budget should provide:
- a. A commitment to fully-funded and resourced Tribunals including language interpretation and elimination of technology barriers,
 - b. A moratorium on eviction enforcement until the LTB backlog is adequately dealt with; and,
 - c. A shift away from the Digital First strategy in any Tribunal model, as it primarily targets vulnerable tenants and those social assistance recipients who often already face high barriers to accessing their rights in the legal process (ex: language, technology, and disability).
- 6) **Equity in Employment Secretariat** – Data continues to show that racialized and Indigenous employees have worse labour market outcomes, complicated by systemic racism and discrimination within employment. The 2023 Ontario budget should provide:
- a. A fully mandated and adequately resourced Secretariat must be established. Its function would be to implement a mandatory and comprehensive provincial employment equity program in Ontario to level the playing field for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour, women, immigrants, refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities and 2SLGBTQ+ community members and to ensure equity-based employment practices for all across the province.
- 7) **Legal Aid Ontario and Access to Justice** – Cuts to Legal Aid Ontario and refugee and immigration legal services have had a significant impact on access to justice for Canada’s largest population of low-income racialized people. The lack of sustainable legal aid / legal clinic funding has meant a reduction in the capacity to provide legal services in all areas of poverty law. These services are regularly overtaxed by users. Ontario continues to offer provincial correctional facilities to CBSA to hold immigration detainees. The treatment of detainees within the facility raises deeply troubling questions about United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and expectations set by Canadian courts. Many are

held in remote locations far from family and community, and other supports they may need including legal supports. The 2023 Ontario budget should:

- a. Increase funding commensurate with the needs of low and no income Ontarians who rely on these services, including large and growing populations of racialized newcomers to Ontario.
- b. Work with the Federal Government to establish a long-term, sustainable funding model for Immigration and Refugee legal aid in Ontario.
- c. End the agreement with Canada Border Services Agency on holding immigration detainees in provincial correctional centres.

8) Fortification of the Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) – Ontario’s Anti-Racism Directorate plays a critical role in understanding the impact of systemic racism on all life outcomes for racialized people and continues work towards data collection and legislative/policy change to improve systemic barriers for these communities. The 2023 Ontario budget should include the following:

- a. The ARD must be resourced to provide for the collection and analysis of ethno-racially and otherwise appropriately disaggregated data across all provincial Ministries and public institutions – including the Ministry of Health; and,
- b. The Directorate’s capacity to engage in ongoing monitoring, analysis and program development must be enhanced in order to implement comprehensive and inclusive equity and anti-racism policies and practices.

9) Education Resourcing – Education outcomes in racialized communities in Ontario continue to be worse than for non-racialized (ex: higher rates of suspension/expulsion and streaming). To support racialized students the Province must immediately invest in:

- a. Reversing the pre-COVID cuts made to education,
- b. Reduced class sizes,
- c. Procurement of technology; and,
- d. Where it remains applicable, appropriate resources for the home environment to facilitate online learning.

10) Health – Effective March 21, 2020, the Government of Ontario began to cover medically necessary health services for uninsured people who do not meet the criteria for provincial health care coverage and effectively suspended the 3-month

residence requirement – however, this was done on a temporary basis. Ontario holds a large population of racialized people who are uninsured. The 2023 Ontario budget should:

- a. Provide universal health care for all people in Ontario. Proactive health care is prioritized as a measure to save costs and lives. These above measures must be made permanent and expanded beyond emergency services,
- b. The Province must fund targeted and culturally tailored approaches to improving health outcomes for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour, who continue to face poorer health care outcomes in Ontario;
- c. Increase investment in public and community-based mental health services and coverage and
- d. Previous cuts to health care, including the delisting of services, must be reviewed and reversed.

11) Increase Funding for Women’s Services– Violence against women and girls increased by up to 20 per cent during the pandemic. Women who were already facing systemic barriers were disproportionately impacted, particularly Indigenous, racialized and refugee and migrant women. In general, women faced greater social and economic hardships, including an increase in unpaid caregiving responsibilities, unsafe work, job loss, and housing precarity, all of which disproportionately affect racialized women. The 2023 Ontario budget should provide:

- a. Funding for women’s services including women’s centres, shelters, child care, and language interpretation services,
- b. and
- c. Make improvements to access and coverage of funds for the victims of gender-based violence (GBV), as the Victim Quick Response program vastly underperforms and fails to provide the same degree of coverage and recourse as its predecessor under the Compensation for Victims of Crime Act.

12) Combatting Hate in Ontario – there has been an alarming rise in the incidence of hate-motivated crimes, and especially violent crimes that must be stemmed. As seen in Ontario, hate crime often targets racialized communities, most notably Indigenous, Black, and Muslim communities. The 2023 Ontario budget should:

- a. Fund consultation of affected groups; and

- b. A subsequent commitment to funding the recommended initiatives and non-law-enforcement-based programming to prevent these crimes.

13) Law Enforcement and Mental Health – Racialized communities, especially the Black and Indigenous communities, continue to be victims of incarceration at disproportionately high levels. Currently, the sole funds allocated toward this issue anticipate mental health crises; while mobile crisis teams are necessary, proactive approaches have been proven dollar for dollar to be the most effective and least costly in achieving outcomes across systems. The 2023 Ontario Budget should:

- a. Redirect funding from law enforcement budgets towards community-based models of mutual aid, safety, and other ameliorative approaches to the issues underlying the symptoms which law enforcement seeks to address; and
- b. Public health and mental health services must be funded in consultation with the communities they serve.

14) Immigrants, Refugees and Migrants - Immigrants, refugees and migrants face disproportionate levels of poverty, systemic barriers and discrimination. Racialized immigrants are disproportionately impacted, as are migrants with precarious immigration status. The 2023 Ontario Budget should:

- a. Increase investment in the Newcomer Settlement Program and Language Training program; and
- b. Invest in services to remove systemic barriers and support the licensure of internationally educated professionals and tradespeople.

Submitted by: Shalini Konanur (on behalf of SALCO, the Colour of Poverty Colour of Change, the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, Punjabi Community Health Services, Access Alliance, the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, the Black Legal Action Centre, and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants)