

DISABILITY AND POVERTY



Defend Disability is an advocacy group composed of people with lived experience of disability and poverty, frontline health providers, social policy experts, legal practitioners, health-specific NGOs, community agencies and anti-poverty and disability rights advocates.

The pandemic's devastating impacts on people's mental and physical health, economic stability and overall wellbeing has disproportionately affected Ontarians living with disabilities. As the province recovers from the impacts of COVID-19, we must ensure Ontarians living with disabilities are not left further behind. In fact, this recovery is an opportunity to pave a new path forward that prioritizes health and dignity for all.

- People with disabilities are about twice as likely to live in poverty in Canada.
- 1/3 of people living in poverty in Canada are women with disabilities. The risk of living in poverty is especially high for racialized and Indigenous people and lone parents.
- Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates have been frozen at \$1,169 per month since 2018 for a single person with a disability. Rates have not kept pace with inflation for the past three decades and leave many people with disabilities caught in a cycle of deep poverty.
- The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has saved nearly half a billion dollars in social assistance costs during the pandemic, and yet the province has still kept benefit rates frozen.
- 69% of ODSP/social assistance clients live in private market rental housing in Ontario where the average cost of a bachelor apartment can range from \$700/month in Sudbury to over \$1200/month in Toronto.

PRIORITIES FOR THE COMING MANDATE

1. **Immediately raise ODSP rates to \$2000 per month, indexed to inflation, as the rate for single adults without children** in order to allow people with disabilities to pay for the extra costs associated with living with a disability and to live with increased autonomy, self-determination, and economic, political and social inclusion.
2. **Replace the current myriad of rate structures with a single flat-rate** by combining the basic needs and shelter allowance amounts. This will eliminate the need for intrusive questions regarding clients' living situations, ensure fairness and support faster pathways to adequate housing.
3. **Expand access to rent supplements and affordable housing.** Rent continues to be the highest expense for the vast majority of social assistance clients and eviction applications have accelerated due to the COVID pandemic. Portable housing benefits to bridge the gap between income and rent should be made available to ODSP clients paying private market rent. Access to the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit must be increased. The province must commit to building safe, affordable, accessible housing where tenants can live with security, comfort and dignity.
4. **Commit to a poverty elimination plan** that uses a comprehensive and holistic approach to end deep poverty in Ontario within 5 years and all poverty in Ontario within 10 years.
5. **Engage social assistance clients in the modernization of social assistance and ensure services are client-centered.** It is critical that people with disabilities and ODSP clients are consistently and meaningfully engaged in any social assistance transformation. Further, the province must reverse the plan to outsource social services to for-profit multinational corporations and remove 'pay for performance' incentives for social assistance managers that risk coercing clients into potentially ill-suited, dead-end, and/or low paying jobs.