

INCOME SECURITY | PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

Income security refers to a household that can provide the means to keep themselves fed and safely housed. With some 30% of workers in Ontario engaged in ‘precarious work’, which means that they are poorly paid, they are income insecure, unprotected, and cannot support their family. They fill permanent job needs but are denied permanent employee rights.

The numbers of Ontario families with children and individuals who rely on low, fluctuating incomes continues to grow. They face greater labour market instability, less job security, and more non-standard, precarious work. Essential needs are increasingly out of reach for them, making it harder to climb out of poverty.

To respond to this situation, the province asked a select panel of people with expertise on the income security system, including people from Ontario’s Indigenous community, to propose a way out. In their report, [Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#), they recommended steps to be taken and a timetable to improve Ontario’s income security system and better support the diversity of people using it.

The panel said, “the human toll caused by inadequacies in the current system, including the deprivation, despair and lost opportunities for individuals and families living in poverty. Higher health care, social service and justice system costs and lower tax revenues follow as a reminder of the poor outcomes people are experiencing. The bottom line is that poverty is expensive and it costs us all.”¹⁷

In Ontario, the ‘income security system’, consists of ODSP (ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM) and OW (ONTARIO WORKS). It also includes inputs from a variety of federal and other programs (Employment Insurance, Child Tax Benefit, Canada Pension Plan, Workplace Safety, Insurance among others).

The ‘ROADMAP’ recommended that a MINIMUM INCOME STANDARD in Ontario to be adopted and implemented over the next 10 years through a combination of supports across the income security system. It said that a housing benefit should be introduced to assist all low-income people with the high cost of housing, whether or not they receive social assistance, so they are not forced to choose between a home and other necessities.

It advised that income support for children be provided outside of social assistance, so that all low-income families can benefit fully regardless of income source. It said the provincial government should work with the federal government through the 2017 Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) so that it plays a greater role in contributing to income adequacy for low-income workers in Ontario.

“We all have a shared interest in supporting everyone’s ability to thrive and contribute to the social fabric of our communities and the economic well-being of our province. Almost everyone has at least one family member, friend or neighbour who is grappling with poverty.” Income Security: A Roadmap for Change – October 2017

The 'ROADMAP' stressed that it was critical to make essential health benefits available to all low-income people, so those in deepest poverty have access to services they need. It underscored that procedural fairness should be embedded in all aspects of the income security system through adequate policies, procedures, practices and timely appeal mechanisms.

The election is an opportunity to select candidates who will ensure that a new provincial government will finally put in place the means to ensure income security for all in Ontario. That means modernizing Ontario's response to working poverty and protecting the poorest from falling further behind.

In casting your vote, you should make yourself aware of what candidates are committed to continue to move forward to create an income security system and identifying a clear path forward with concrete steps to bring it about.