



# Ontario Spring 2021 Pre-Budget Submission

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President  
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Thank you for the opportunity to present our thoughts on the Ontario government 2021-2022 budget. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario is the largest Union in the province with more than 280,000 members. You will find CUPE members working in health care, municipalities, school boards, social services, airlines and post-secondary education. We provide the public services that help make Ontario a great place to live.

CUPE members work on the front lines helping to protect Ontarians from the pandemic every day. We are in your hospital emergency rooms and ICU's; we are the PSW's in long-term care and retirement homes; we are the paramedics who will get you to the hospital safely when you cannot get there yourself. CUPE members are the staff working in public health, testing and contact tracing. A significant number of CUPE members are also on the front lines supporting Ontarians. We are the shelter workers helping the homeless. We are the childcare workers supporting parents, working in essential services. We are in the classrooms helping our children learn. We are the essential service workers who need to report to work in order to ensure that our communities continue to function: the solid waste collectors, the snow plough drivers, the drinking water specialists, the public transit workers, the hydro electricians. Thousands of CUPE members in Ontario have contracted COVID-19 in the course of their work and at least seven CUPE members have died. Even as we got through the first wave, where we had 30,000 members laid off, and as services were restored across the province, we still have close to 5,000 CUPE members currently on lay off because of the pandemic.

We are submitting this brief to you in the middle of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the Province is -- again -- in lockdown. Up until a week ago, our schools were closed. Our children have missed weeks of in person learning. Most shops and services are closed. Our unemployment rate is over 10%. Those hit hardest are those with low wage part time employment.

And yet, even with this second lock down, over two hundred of our long-term care facilities remain in outbreak. We continue to see outbreaks in warehouses, food processing factories and manufacturing centres. In southern Ontario, most of our Hospital ICU's are at or over capacity. COVID-19 testing capacity has not met demand. Public health units in the hot zones have given up tracing contacts because they cannot keep up.

By the numbers this second wave is much worse than the first. In the three months since your fall 2020 budget, in the three months ending January 31<sup>st</sup>, we have seen almost 200,000 new cases of COVID-19 in Ontario. That is more than four times the number of cases we saw in the spring. Also, tragically, during this same three months more than 3,100 Ontarians have died. This is hundreds more than died in the first wave. Thankfully, the numbers are finally starting to drop.

Last March, Ontarians shut down the economy. We stayed at home to give the government time necessary implement the public sector supports we need to protect ourselves from Covid-19. Ten months have elapsed. Very few of the necessary supports have been installed at the level needed to keep our communities functioning safely. Lockdowns are effective but they come at a huge cost.

The need to develop and implement strategies that go beyond lockdown is long overdue. There are ways to mitigate and control the spread of this virus. However, those strategies require collective action and robust government services. Where failures have occurred, they can be attributed to government's past austerity measures. Now is the time to reverse direction and bolster our public services. With unemployment at record highs, enhanced staffing to implement pandemic protocols should be a no-brainer.

And what of after the pandemic? Society after the pandemic will be different than the society we had when we entered the pandemic. Ontarians will need supports to heal at a social level, an emotional level, a developmental level, and an economic level. Additionally, issues such as climate change and discrimination against racialized communities have not gone away. Now is the time to start planning to rebuild better than before. It is our submission that a vigorous and renewed public sector is key to that rebuild.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **1. Spend the Money Being Held in Reserve**

Both the Financial Accountability Office (FAO) and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report that the Ontario government is sitting on up to seven billion dollars of unspent COVID-19 relief money. Most of these funds have come from the federal government. The FAO also points to other reserves and contingencies totalling an additional five billion dollars in the last years' budgets with no allocation.

Spend the money. This is not the time to put away surpluses to reduce the deficit or sprinkle goodies at election time. Spend the money now and get this pandemic under control.

### **2. Tax the Winners**

There are companies and individuals who have done very well during this pandemic. The Loblaws, the Amazons and the Costcos have seen huge increases in their bottom line as demand for their goods and services skyrocketed. At the same time there are many Ontarians who are suffering. They have lost jobs, lost businesses and have seen their income drop dramatically. Those Ontarians cannot afford renewed austerity when the pandemic is over. They will need access to robust public services.

Instead of focussing on cutting the services that Ontario needs, CUPE Ontario recommends that your government increase taxation on those who are most able to pay more. The revenue side of your budget needs a closer look.

- a) Implement a wealth tax of 2% on net worth of \$5 million or more.**
- b) Raise the marginal tax rate on the wealthiest 1.0% of Ontarians.**
- c) Restore Ontario's corporate capital tax for medium and large corporations to 0.3% for general corporations and to 0.9% for financial corporations.**
- d) Improve tax audit and compliance measures.**

- e) **Collect sales tax and corporate income tax from internet and social media services like Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google and impose a digital services tax.**
- f) **Reverse the energy subsidies announced in the last budget to commercial and industrial users.**
- g) **Re-introduce the cap and trade fund or introduce a Carbon Tax to wean Ontarians off of fossil fuels.**

### **3. Improve Ontario Workplaces**

Although many Ontarians can work from home, approximately 65% of employees are obliged to report to a workplace, even during a lockdown. These are essential services that must remain open. It is not just the schools and the health facilities, it is also the factories, the food processing plants, and the mail order warehouses.

A huge proportion of COVID-19 transmission is happening in workplaces. Lower paid precarious workers are most at risk. Working multiple part time jobs, without paid sick leave or the ability to advocate for health and safety measures, these Ontarians are the ones most likely to get infected, which in turn endangers their families and the public. When the needs of the poorest are not met, the risk of infection increases for everyone.

It is imperative that the Ontario government ramp up workplace protections for our essential workers.

- a) Legislate a minimum of ten (10) days paid sick leave and unlimited paid COVID19 isolation leave.**

Organizations as diverse as the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Ontario Big City Mayors, the Medical Officers of Health in Ontario Health Units, the Ontario Medical Association, and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have all called on your government to provide paid sick leave to employees to allow those who are sick, or those who need to isolate to do so and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community. Workers who are exposed to COVID-19 need to stay at home and isolate. Workers who feel sick need to get tested to determine if they have COVID-19 or a cold. If workers do not have access to paid sick leave, staying at home or getting tested can mean they can't make

their rent or feed their children. It is an impossible choice. CUPE Ontario strongly recommends that you bring in paid sick leave with the 2021-22 budget.

**b) Shore up WSIB protections against COVID19**

Employees who contract COVID-19 at the workplace are having enormous difficulty getting workers compensation claims to cover their illness. Even health care workers and staff in workplaces experiencing outbreaks have to prove they contracted COVID-19 on the job in order to claim WSIB benefits.

The rules need to be changed. Your government should make it presumptive that any employee in a health care setting who contracts COVID-19 is deemed to have caught it at the workplace. The same should apply to any employee in a non-health care workplace who contracts COVID-19 during a workplace outbreak.

**c) Immediately raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour**

**d) Repeal Bill 124 and remove the 1.0% cap on public sector wages.**

**e) Immediately remove all Emergency Orders impacting workers rights and access to their Collective Agreements that were continued by Bill 195.**

**4. Declare Anti-Black Racism a public health emergency and immediately develop, with true stakeholder consultation, a comprehensive and fully funded plan to address this scourge in our communities.**

This pandemic has thrown a spotlight on the inequities in our society and the risk they pose to all of us. The essential service work of the pandemic is disproportionately done by women and racialized minorities. What is abundantly clear is that our racialized communities have suffered the most. COVID19 is not the only public health emergency in Ontario. As a society we need to formally recognize how racism harms many Ontarians and divert the necessary attention and resources into fighting it.

**a) Restore and increase the funding to the Ontario Human Rights Commission to deal with the huge and growing back log**

**b) Restore funding to the Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate and its sub-committees.**

**c) Mandate the creation of a committee under the Anti-Racism Directorate that would have inter-ministerial connections and responsibilities for concrete actions to mitigate this public health crisis.**

**d) Introduce Equity and Inclusive training for all government funded agencies and institutions.**

Many marginalized communities have often experienced prejudice, bias and indifference when accessing front line services. Your government needs to allocate specific funds so that all agencies can have access to the resources necessary to offer much need training to front-line staff that deliver public services.

**5. Expand Our Public Hospital Capacity:**

The pandemic tested our health care system like never before. We acknowledge your government has announced significant additional spending in health care, reported that you will spend 8.3 billion health care dollars to fight the pandemic in 2020-21, and that you have projected a four billion dollar influx of COVID-19 funding in 2021-22 and then two billion dollars in additional COVID-19 funding for health care in 2022-23.

**a) Increase pandemic funding in years two and three**

Nevertheless, the pandemic funding is not sufficient in the second and third year. The Ontario Hospital Association has calculated that even with the additional influx of dollars, hospitals are projected to fall two billion dollars into deficit this year.

**b) Improve base health care funding.**

Base funding to deal with hospital operations is still too low. Prior to 2020 Ontario per capita spending on health care was the lowest in Canada. The system was stretched to the breaking point. The core funding increases that were previously announced (1.4% in 2020-21 and projected to 3.7% in 2021-22) are not sufficient to deal with population growth, our aging population and inflation.

**c) Address the surgical backlog by hiring more hospital staff**

The pandemic has created a huge backlog for surgeries. The government of British Columbia was able to eliminate 90% of the elective surgery backlog due to the first wave of the pandemic. They provided additional resources to BC Hospitals to hire additional staff, run operating theatres for longer periods during the day and coordinate surgical wait times. The Ontario government needs to follow suit. Just because surgeries are deemed elective,

does not mean they are not important. The delay in elective surgeries can cause permanent impairments. Ontario hospitals need the resources.

**d) Support a fully public system of health delivery**

CUPE Ontario is alarmed by your government's apparent intention to transfer non acute hospital procedures to "alternate health facilities" *including* private for-profit organizations. Ontarians do not want their health care delivered by private for profit operators. There are no margins for profit in health care that do not compromise quality and health outcomes. Use the money to increase capacity at our public hospitals.

**6. Make Long Term Care staffing a priority, not an afterthought**

The tragedy of the pandemic was made worse by the massive staffing shortages at many long-term care facilities. Some of these shortages were caused by staff who fell sick with COVID-19 or who needed to isolate because of exposure to COVID-19. However, many of the staffing shortages were the result of short-sighted decisions made by your government that need to be rectified immediately.

**a) Modify the one-site rule to guarantee full time hours for all LTC staff**

The one site rule, which prohibits long term care from working at more than one health facility is absolutely necessary to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. However, the rule has had serious unintended consequences and resulted in severe staffing shortages in many facilities. Many part-time staff have seen huge reductions in their pay because they are not able to work at multiple facilities.

In British Columbia, where the government also implemented a one site rule, LTC staff were guaranteed full time hours and guaranteed certain minimum rates of pay and full-time benefits. Although staff were given an option to indicate which home they preferred to work in, staff were deployed to those workplaces where there was a need thus ensuring that all homes had some level of staffing.

**b) Provide pandemic pay to all LTC staff not just PSW's**

Your government's announcement in October 2020 to extend pandemic pay only for PSW's



has created huge inequalities in LTC facilities and reduced an already cratering morale. In some facilities PSW's are now being paid more than Registered Practical Nurses.

All LTC staff work together to care for Ontario's elderly. All put their health on the line, all are at risk of contracting COVID-19. There should be no differentiation made between PSW's and other LTC staff with respect to pandemic pay.

**c) Recruit and Train at least 20,000 PSW's through our Public College System.**

The greatest impediment to improving the care standard in Long Term Care facilities in the long term is the ongoing shortage of Personal Support Workers. In the summer of 2020, the government of Quebec recruited 10,000 residents to become PSW's. Those chosen had their tuition and expenses paid for by the government. Additionally, they were paid an hourly wage while in school and guaranteed work in a facility with a minimum base income on graduation. Sixty-five thousand Quebec residents applied for the program and it no doubt has helped with the staffing shortages in that province.

**d) Raise the wages for all LTC employees in line with median hourly rates in public hospitals.**

Work in a long-term care facility is difficult, physical and skilled. The pay and benefits provided to LTC staff is pathetically low. Long term care staff can often make more working in coffee shops or retail outlets. They absolutely can make more working in hospitals which are also facing staffing shortages. If the Ontario government is serious about addressing the staffing issues in long term care you will need to encourage significant improvements in the wages and working conditions for long term care workers.

**e) Immediately start funding LTC Facilities based the 4-hour hands on care rule.**

In November your government announced its intention to move to a legislated standard of four hours of hands on nursing care per resident per day. To date, there has been no funding for that standard. This budget should immediately provide the additional funding to any long term care facility that can hire to meet the standard. There must be an accompanying procedure to verify these desperately needed additional resources are being used to improved staffing and nothing else. This is particularly important for commercial operators in the sector who have a track record of taking public money meant to improve care and using it to augment profits.

**f) Announce a moratorium on granting any new Long-term Care bed licenses to for profit operators.**

The pandemic illustrated the problems with for profit long term care facilities. For Profit homes had more outbreaks and more deaths than their counterparts in the not-for-profit sector and in the municipal sector. For profit facilities were the most likely to skimp on cleaning supplies, PPE and health and safety protocols that kept residents and staff safe. As we indicated above, there are no margins for profit in health care that do not compromise quality and health outcomes.

## **7. Schools**

School is essential to children's health, growth, and development. The government's mishandling of the reopening of schools in September, and the ongoing uncertainty in the education sector about school openings/closures and health and safety measures are harming students and staff alike. You cannot continue to fail our children. Your government must do much more to contain the spread of the virus in the community and in schools and keep them safe for students, teachers, staff and parents.

**a) Extend pandemic funding to 2022-23**

In August 2020 the Ministry announced \$309 million in additional funding would be made available to help reopen schools in September. Later that month the federal government announced that it would augment the province's investment with an additional \$763.34 million (\$381 million of which was allocated for September, the second half to be allocated based on federal government approval in December 2020).<sup>1</sup> Given the uncertainty of the duration of the pandemic it is entirely likely that the same kinds of measures utilized this year to promote healthy and safe learning and working environments in schools will continue to be necessary in the 2020-21 school year. As such, this money should be extended by an additional year, at a minimum, as a COVID-19 mitigation investment.

**b) Make permanent the investments made for the 2020-21 school year in school boards and add a further of \$1.153 billion towards education supports.**

Many of the purposes for which this COVID-19 related money was to be allocated are needs

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/08/26/prime-minister-announces-support-safe-return-school> and <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/58135/additional-funds-enhance-ontarios-robust-back-to-school-plan>

that will continue beyond the end of the pandemic. There will need to be an ongoing commitment to improving ventilation in schools. Additional custodial and caretaking staff will be needed to improve the cleaning standards in schools, which will help reduce ongoing risk of illness from a myriad of sources (including annual cold and flu transmission in schools). Ongoing funding for special education staff and mental health supports in schools will benefit students and help improve outcomes.

**c) Increase the education operating budget to meet growing needs.**

Our education system has been decimated by decades of underfunding, punctuated by deep cuts from your government since 2018. The provincial budget released on November 5, 2020 gives us reason to believe that it is this government's intention to not only continue to underfund schools, but to intensify the crisis. When pandemic funding is removed, the total funding for education funding will be less than one percent in 2021 and 2022. We urge the government to reverse this plan to once again force austerity on boards; an austerity that can only come at the expense of student outcomes, student and staff safety, and the jobs security and working conditions of education workers across the system.

**d) Reinstate the mandatory First Nations, Metis and Inuit curriculum in elementary and secondary schools that was cut by your government.**

Ensure the curriculum content and delivery includes proper and thorough consultation with the Indigenous community to reflect the history, experiences, voices and wisdom of the Indigenous community

**8. Provide an Immediate Injection of cash to Ontario's childcare centres**

The pandemic has been devastating for Ontario childcare centres. Many have lost significant revenue and have had to staff up to meet infection control standards. Daycare's operate on the thinnest of margins. More than 130 childcare centres have shuttered because they simply could not operate under the current conditions. Many dozens more are on the brink.

Any pandemic recovery will require safe, reliable childcare for parents entering and re-entering the workforce. We cannot afford to lose any more spaces. An immediate injection of cash is required to stabilize the sector. While the federal budget is looming and there is

sure to be an announcement about the sector in it, community non-profit, and public care cannot wait. Daycares need support for everything: rent, general operations, payroll, PPE etc. The sector cannot afford to lose any more spaces.

## **9. Provide unconditional grants to compensate Municipalities for all their pandemic-related revenue losses.**

With the exception of transit, there has been very little money allocated to Municipalities to help with their operational costs and lost revenue due to the pandemic. In the 2020-21 budget, your government flatlined increases to grants to municipal governments through the *Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund (OMPF)*. Most municipalities will see no increase in funding, and some will see a net reduction in the grant provided.

In the meanwhile, Municipal revenues have been decimated by this pandemic. Ontario cities have seen massive losses in revenue because of declines in community rentals, permits, fees and course offerings. Further, they have been required to ramp up their public health expenditures and continue to offer valuable municipal services.

Ontarians rely heavily on the services provided by our municipalities. Your government needs to support municipalities by providing the grants needed to **fully** compensate them for their pandemic related losses, only this time with no requirements attached that municipalities examine cuts first. Municipalities have been operating on bare bones operating budgets for many years, prior to the pandemic. Now is not the time for the province to be perceived as suggesting or supporting cuts to vital services.

## **10. Social Services and the Vulnerable**

### **a) Raise OW and ODSP rates by 55% to bring them in line with historical levels.**

Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Payments have fallen well behind historic levels when the cost of living is taken into account. Numerous studies show that increasing OW and ODSP rates create huge improvements in social outcomes.

### **b) Make the Pandemic pay a permanent feature**

The bump in compensation to workers providing personal care must be made

permanent. The acknowledgement that this was required for specific care workers should also not be limited. Workers in sectors such as child protection are also on the front lines of service and in some communities, they are the last line of care and support. While the additional compensation was an important step towards fairness for personal care workers, it needs to be expanded and lasting.

**c) Fully Fund Pay equity costs:**

Too often pay equity obligations are ignored, because the social services sector simply does not have enough resources. The wage gap is still very real; in Ontario, women earn only \$0.74 for every dollar earned by men. The situation is amplified in social services as the sector has been under-resourced for decades. There must be money to catch up and achieve equality in the province.

**d) Commit to continued funding of Developmental Services Day Programing:**

In Guelph Wellington, there has been a move to shut down day programming for adults being supported. There are rumours that this is a more widespread goal of agencies and/or the province. While inclusion and equity are important tenants of those assisting adults with developmental challenges, shutting down day programs will have the opposite effect – it will close of opportunities for those being supported. While the government has made investments in this sector, they need to ensure the continued delivery of these programs.

**11. Invest in future innovation through Public Universities and Colleges**

- a) Fund the previously announced 10% tuition fee reduction**
- b) Replace funding lost through crisis-caused enrolment decreases**
- c) Give international students access to OHIP**
- d) Cancel the flawed performance-based funding.**

The recent move by Laurentian University to file for bankruptcy protection serves as a stark illustration of the crisis of Ontario Post Secondary institutions.

Even prior to the pandemic, Universities saw net cuts in funding from this government. In 2018 tuition was cut by 10% but your government refused to provide any additional grants to meet the shortfall. With the pandemic, Universities have been driven even

further into crisis. Enrolment is down, especially amongst International students, revenues have declined as most students are attending courses on-line and are not on campus or in residence.

At the same time your government has insisted on certifying substandard bible colleges as universities, damaging our international reputation for academic excellence. A robust public post secondary system is key to a post pandemic economic recovery. High-quality public institutions set Ontario apart from the world. It is Ontario's built-in competitive advantage. The government should recognize this and support the workers and students of this province and fund our Universities appropriately.

## **12. Address the Crisis of Police Violence against Black, Racialized, Indigenous and other marginalized communities.**

The events of the past few years, with the failure of the RCMP to deal with missing and murdered indigenous women, the police shootings of racialized youth and examples of brutality against those with mental health illnesses has highlighted how our public safety system is broken in Ontario and in Canada. There are calls redirect police resources into other community supports which are more responsive to the needs of all Ontarians. With this in mind, we recommend that:

- a) **The Ontario government should establish a Commission of Inquiry into Police Violence and Public Safety with a mandate to:**
  - provide a blueprint for a restructured public safety model that works to address safety issues of all Ontarians and that moves away from dependence on police forces to provide all public safety services
  - establish procedures and structures that ensure and enforce transparency and accountability by individual police officers for their actions
- b) **Further, your government should immediately restructure the civilian review agency to**
  - make its investigations fully transparent to the public
  - give them a broader mandate to investigate complaints
- c) **Finally, your government should ensure meaningful representation of racialized, indigenous and marginalized communities on the Civilian Review Agency and all Police Service Boards**

## **13. Place a moratorium on all residential tenant evictions and landlord applications for evictions until the pandemic is over.**

## **Conclusion:**

CUPE members are the ones who are protecting and supporting Ontarians through this pandemic. The services we provide are an integral element to any economic recovery. If your government truly wishes to protect and support Ontarians, if you wish to set the stage for a prosperous recovery, then you will need to put more funds into supporting and protecting the public programs and services that hold this province together.

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