

What the 2012 Ontario budget means for you

The budget, tabled on March 27, includes \$18 billion in cuts. Those cuts hit every sector. This document outlines some of the central items. Because Ontario has a minority government, opposition parties can introduce changes to the budget, so there is still time to avert the worst cuts, or even to steer the Liberals off their dangerous austerity agenda.

Hospitals: Funding freeze to base hospital budgets means many bed closures and job losses. . Non-acute services will be moved out to community clinics. Some projects to build new hospitals cancelled.

Education: \$500 million cut over next three years. Boards instructed to close schools. Students will be limited to 34 credits. Full-day kindergarten going ahead, but without before- and after-school, board-delivered care component, so no integrated day.

Social assistance: Rates frozen, leaving poorest Ontarians 20% worse off than they were at end of Mike Harris administration. Planned increases to child benefits cut in half.

Post-secondary education: Liberals will continue with their 30% "Tuition Fee" Grant, but to pay for it will eliminate other grants and cut "non-core programs" at universities. Funding cut of \$160 million post-inflation dollars.

Long-term care: Budget premise here is to download all care to home care, but without sufficient funding. Claims \$210 million in savings can be found in underutilization in sector, but today there are nearly 30,000 people on wait lists for long-term care beds.

Social services: No mention of childcare whatsoever. Expansion of direct funding in developmental services, with no mention of agency funding. Children's Aid Society mergers and regionalization of service delivery. Downloading of ODSP.

Wages: Budget calls for a two-year wage freeze for all public-sector workers. Although this is not contained in the budget bill, in his speech Finance Minister Dwight Duncan threatened to legislate a wage freeze if it is not achieved at the bargaining table.

Arbitration: Tight new timelines for completion – which would ultimately limit choice of arbitrators. After 12 months, without an award, arbitration will be decided by Ontario Labour Relations Board.

Pensions: In jointly-sponsored plans where members contribute less than 50%, rate increases to 50/50. Single-employer plans required to phase in 50/50 split of costs. Again, this is not in the budget bill itself but is the stated direction of the government