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Poverty Reduction Strategy (Annual Report 2017)

This report highlights our progress – and what we plan to do next – in our efforts to reduce child poverty, eliminate chronic homelessness, help people move towards employment, increase food security, develop an action plan for income security reform and invest in programs and community-designed solutions.

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Minister's Message

In my time as Ontario's Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, I have seen people struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living and facing precarious employment with little job security.

Our plan for creating fairness and opportunity during this period of rapid economic change includes a higher minimum wage, better working conditions, free tuition for hundreds of thousands of students, easier access to affordable licensed child care, and free prescription drugs for everyone under 25 through the most significant expansion of medicare in a generation.

Everyone should have the opportunity to thrive. Our current Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential, uses an evidence-based, cumulative impact approach to policies and programs to ensure we make progress toward significant milestones.

I am pleased to report that the most recent data, from 2015, shows the positive impact our investments and interventions have had, particularly through the Ontario Child Benefit. 24.4 percent fewer children were living in poverty in 2015 compared to 2012, and 37.3 percent fewer children were living in deep poverty in 2015 compared to 2012. Our progress will accelerate when we see the impacts of the Canada Child Benefit in the report next year.

This is a good sign, but we still have work to do. We are exploring how we can help people living on low incomes to get ahead through a roadmap to income security reform, and by piloting a Basic Income to help ensure that everyone shares in Ontario's economic growth.

I recognize that it will take more than income for our communities to be at their strongest. We are ensuring that everyone in Ontario has a safe and affordable place to call home by increasing the supply of housing options to help build stronger, more inclusive communities.

We are finding new ways to support Ontarians through our first Food Security Strategy by bringing partners together to identify local, sustainable approaches to reduce poverty while making the most of our resources. We are already doing so through our Local Poverty Reduction Fund, which measures the impact of 119 innovative initiatives to build a body of knowledge and identify potential solutions that we can scale across the province.

As we move forward, we will build on the results in this report and continue to pursue our targets so that every Ontarian has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Peter Z. Milczyn

Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
Minister of Housing

Introduction

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy is based on the vision that every Ontarian has the opportunity to achieve their full potential and to contribute to a prosperous and healthy province. This report shares information about progress, profiles local poverty reduction efforts, and highlights areas where we can better support people by creating fairness and opportunity for all Ontarians.

Cumulative investments can reduce poverty and improve quality of life by providing meaningful supports to people at every age and life stage. In 2017, we took action to empower individuals and families to confidently navigate key milestones, whether they are having a child, exploring postsecondary education,

entering the workforce, seeking retraining for a new career, or shifting into retirement. We integrated our supports and services to better meet user needs. This builds on our earlier actions and is making a difference in the lives of Ontarians. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Indicators (see Chapter 5) measure our progress.

Helping Ontarians realize their potential in a changing economy requires a responsive and adaptable system of employment, income and social supports. We are making progress on reducing the gap between income and the cost of living through increases to the minimum wage, the introduction of OHIP+, housing supplements, child care fee subsidies, full-day kindergarten, and free average tuition. We are building on the findings of the Income Security Reform Working Group and parallel working groups with First Nation and Indigenous partners to reform income security. In addition, we are piloting a basic income that will help inform our longer-term plans to better support people living on low incomes.

We will continue to collaborate with the Federal government on their poverty reduction strategy, and with Indigenous partners, municipalities and service partners, to achieve results and improve incomes for Ontarians. And as always, we are excited to continue to engage and learn from Ontarians on how best to reduce poverty and improve outcomes for all.

Breaking the cycle for children and youth

By the numbers

Child Poverty Target:

The number of children living in poverty decreased by 19,000 in 2015, which represents a total decrease of 24.4 percent from 2012.

Depth of Poverty:

The number of children living in deep poverty decreased by 22,000 in 2015, representing a 37.3 percent drop from 2012.

Children in Ontario deserve nothing less than to grow up and have the chance to seize opportunities to achieve their full potential. This belief forms the bedrock of our commitment to reduce child poverty by 25 percent over five years, before the next Poverty Reduction Strategy launches in 2019.

Through major investments, initiatives and economic growth, Ontario continues to make progress in reducing child poverty, and we are closing in on our target of reducing the number of children living in

poverty by 25 percent from a 2012 baseline. The number of children living in deep poverty has gone down by over 37 percent since 2012. Fewer households with children are experiencing poverty, and more children and their families will have brighter and healthier futures.

Making progress

We continue to expand supports and services that help children and their families thrive from birth to graduation and entry to the workforce.

Starting strong for families and children

We believe that every family deserves the dignity and security of a life free from poverty. Central to our commitment to support children and families, the **Ontario Child Benefit (OCB)** provides up to \$1,378 per child per year for over 500,000 low- to moderate-income families from an investment of \$1.125 billion in 2017–18. Just over half of the families who receive the OCB are headed by a single parent. The majority of these families receive the maximum benefit to help with the day-to-day costs of raising children. The OCB is indexed to inflation, helping to protect the purchasing power of vulnerable low- to moderate-income families.

In 2017, we welcomed the announcement by the Federal government that it would accelerate the indexation of the **Canada Child Benefit (CCB)**, which is delivered in partnership with the OCB, to the cost of living as of July 2018 — approximately two years ahead of schedule.[\[1\]](#) The Federal government estimates that indexing the CCB to the cost of living will provide an additional \$5.6 billion in support to Canadian families in the years ahead.

Ontario also continues to invest in child care and early years supports that help children and families access a better quality of life. In 2017, we remained focused on making licensed, high-quality child care more affordable and accessible so that more children can benefit from early years and child care programs that support their learning development and well being.

Though the number of licensed child care spaces in Ontario has increased by 117 percent since 2003–04, challenges remain in keeping up with the demand. Public and sector consultations in 20 communities across the province, as well as online, revealed that:

- many parents struggle to access affordable, responsive child care;
- child care needs vary in urban and rural contexts, as well as in Northern Ontario; and
- child care is a major factor in women's labour force participation, and accessible and affordable child care contributes to closing the gender wage gap and women's improved economic security.

In 2017, we launched Ontario's **Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework**, informed by these findings. Key actions include:

- increasing access to early years and child care programs and services, including helping 100,000 more children aged 0–4 access licensed child care over five years, and expanding before- and after-school programming for children aged 4–12;
- enhancing affordability by increasing funding for child care fee subsidies and conducting an expert-led affordability study; and
- establishing an early years workforce strategy.

The province also banned child care waitlist fees in September 2016 to improve the accessibility of child care.

Aligned with the Renewed Framework, over 260,000 four- and five-year-olds are currently benefiting from access to Full Day Kindergarten (FDK). Students in FDK are better prepared to enter Grade 1 and be more successful in school. Now in its fourth year of implementation, FDK provides a robust foundation for social, emotional and cognitive development. FDK also helps parents balance work and caregiving responsibilities, as well as save on child care expenses.

Healthy Smiles Ontario

Oral health is an essential component of overall health and is connected to preventing diabetes and other chronic conditions. It can affect a child's school performance, self-esteem and ability to thrive.

Individuals with low incomes have tooth decay rates that are as much as three times higher than people at higher income levels.

On January 1, 2016, the province integrated six existing oral health benefits and programs for children and youth 17 years old and under from low-income households into a single program under the Healthy Smiles Ontario umbrella . This new integrated dental program makes it easier for eligible children and youth to access timely dental care.

Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) provided access to free preventive, routine and emergency dental services for approximately 470,000 enrolled children and youth 17 years old and under from low-income households in 2017. This is an increase from approximately 425,000 in 2016.

Wage enhancement for early years and child care professionals in licensed child care settings

The government has made an ongoing funding commitment to provide early years and child care

professionals working in licensed child care settings with a wage enhancement/home care child enhancement grant. These grants support those who help children learn and grow, by increasing their income and making their jobs more secure.

The Ministry of Education is currently working with 47 municipalities and municipal boards, as well as 56 First Nations communities, to administer wage enhancements. Over 37,000 child care professionals benefited from the wage enhancements/home care enhancement grants in 2016.

Foundations for learning

We have a responsibility to ensure that children and youth in Ontario have access to supports and tools for lifelong learning. Part of this responsibility includes helping students access nutritious meals and snacks before and during school. This is based on research that demonstrates that children and youth need healthy food to support their growth both physically and mentally. This understanding informs the work of the **Student Nutrition Program**, which provides nutritious meals and snacks to more than 812,500 children in schools across the province, as well as over 120 educational settings in 63 First Nations communities.

The **Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP)** is in the process of expanding across Northern Ontario to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables for approximately 40,000 students, including 8,000 students in over 50 First Nations communities, 29 of which are remote. The NFVP runs for around 20 weeks from January to June, and in addition to a fruit and vegetable serving at least twice a week at no cost, the program supports healthy eating and physical activity education to students.

In a province as large and diverse as Ontario, we know that not all schools have the same requirements. Some urban high schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods can face unique challenges such as student poverty, low academic achievement, and a lack of access to community resources. Recognizing this, we are providing specialized support to 40 high schools across 12 school boards through the **Urban Priority High Schools Initiative**. The initiative is designed to support students in high-risk situations who are experiencing personal and academic challenges that hinder their learning and well-being, and who face barriers to full participation in school, as well as for parent/community engagement programs.

In 2017, we announced a new \$20 million **Rural and Northern Education Fund** that provides targeted financial support for students in rural and northern communities to address the need for:

- enhanced access to transportation options (e.g., late bus runs);
- improved programming and support services (e.g., French immersion, arts education guidance counselling); and
- technology-enabled learning opportunities (e.g., mobile e-learning through tablets or Wi-Fi).

We continue to invest in broadband and special education supports for rural and northern schools.

Local Poverty Reduction Fund Profile: Centre des services communautaires Vanier

Centre des services communautaires Vanier designed the Vanier Social Pediatric Hub to help meet the needs of children, youth and their families in a diverse and underserved community with a large Francophone population and increasing numbers of Indigenous, newcomer and refugee families.

The Hub uses social pediatrics principles to provide welcoming, accessible, bilingual, child- and youth-centred health and social care to the neighbourhood's children and youth (0–17 years) including those with complex psychosocial and medical needs.

It also supports their families by addressing the social determinants of health to reduce toxic stress linked to adverse childhood experiences, and the need for child welfare involvement in weekly Anglophone and Francophone clinics.

The core clinical assessment team consists of a pediatrician, nurse practitioner, social worker/navigator and legal personnel. Multiple community partners work with the core team to offer bilingual health and wellness services on site including a walk-in child and youth mental health clinic, Premier mots/First words and music programs.

“We are thrilled to provide accessible, comprehensive and coordinated health and social care that addresses the needs of the whole child in one location. This is a unique model of practice,” says Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario pediatrician Dr. Sue Bennett.

The Vanier Social Pediatric Hub is the first of its kind in Ontario and is a model for the province.

Reducing barriers to breaking the cycle

Empowering youth to acquire the tools, knowledge and confidence to explore new opportunities can help break the cycle of poverty. Ontario is investing \$55 million over three years to expand youth development programs through the **Enhanced Youth Action Plan** in 11 communities. Approximately 37,500 youth have access to programs including mentorships and a Youth Opportunities Fund that helps at-risk youth access family supports and civic engagement opportunities[2]

As we continue this work, we recognize that systemic racism and prejudice can create additional barriers for racialized, Black and Indigenous youth. Research shows that Indigenous youth face elevated levels of poverty (see Chapter 4), while Black youth become “early leavers” from school at higher rates than other students, and are unemployed at nearly two times the provincial rate.

In 2017, we launched a **Black Youth Action Plan** to help address this disparity with an initial four-year investment of \$47 million to improve outcomes for Black children, youth and families in areas of education, employment and overall well-being. The plan will provide new services and supports focused on increasing opportunities, such as culturally focused parenting initiatives and mentorship programs, supporting access to higher education and skills development, and investing in community outreach and anti-violence initiatives. The plan is currently being rolled out in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, as well as in Ottawa and Windsor.

In a changing economy, access to postsecondary education is vital to pursuing careers in rapid growth sectors including science and technology. Nationally, about seven out of 10 jobs are expected to require some form of higher education or specialized skill.^[3] Yet post-secondary education participation is significantly lower for students from low-income families.

To help close this gap, we are making significant changes for students from low and middle-income families to pursue post-secondary studies through the **Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)**. As part of changes to OSAP, students from households with less than \$50,000 in income will receive all Ontario aid as a grant resulting in no provincial student loan debt. With OSAP grants being used to pay tuition directly, more than 225, 000 full-time university and college students have received free average tuition since fall 2017. To help make transitions to the workforce easier, and to leave graduates with greater take-home income, we increased the minimum salary an individual needs to earn before they begin repaying their Ontario Student Loan from \$25,000 to \$35,000.

Profile: Insight Youth Mentorship Program

Ash

“My mentor is one of the coolest and most important people I have. She is like a big sister to me. She is so encouraging of my thoughts and emotions. I feel like I’ve changed a lot this year. I feel like I’ve changed in personal growth, academic, and mental health. I think being exposed to someone who has experienced college and being exposed to what would be handed to me in the real world helped me.

I feel a lot more confident and I have grown a lot — even my parents have noticed! I don’t feel stuck in one place. This program brings out a lot of potential. Before I couldn’t see my potential and I felt like I couldn’t do most things. But now I believe in myself — it helped a lot. I love this program. This program changed my life and I hope it goes on forever. I think a lot of people will benefit, especially kids younger than me with mental health problems.”

The Insight Youth Mentoring Program is supported by the Ontario Youth Action Plan, and delivered by KEYS Job Centre, Kingston, Ontario.

Supports for Crown Wards

Crown wards often face unique barriers to succeeding in school and pursuing post-secondary education, training and employment. To help remove barriers, we are continuing to invest in **Crown Ward Education Championship Teams** that connect children's aid societies, school boards, colleges and universities to help more Crown wards explore post-secondary education opportunities and pathways.

We are also continuing to refund the costs of applying to post-secondary education through the **Crown Ward Post secondary Application Fee Reimbursement program**.

Moving forward

Building on progress, several programs to help children and families get ahead will be pursued in 2018, including:

- **OHIP+** covers all OHIP-insured children and youth in Ontario aged 24 years and under through the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program from January 1, 2018. In the first month, over 520,000 young people have benefited from access to free prescriptions.
- The **Middle Years Strategy** uses a strengths-based approach to support children ages 6–12 as they transition from early childhood to the teen years. The strategy establishes a shared platform for actions across community, service, government and philanthropic sectors. It recognizes that economic and social determinants impact well-being and development. The strategy generates a profile of well-being for the middle years, based on indicators such as the percentage of children who eat vegetables once a day or engage in vigorous physical activity.
- **Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan** will identify and eliminate discriminatory practices, systemic barriers and bias that may unintentionally disadvantage certain student populations, including racialized students, students experiencing poverty, Indigenous students, children in care and newcomers to Canada. A key action within the plan is to develop a renewed approach to Grade 9 in which all students are better able to explore pathways to work, college, apprenticeship and university.
- Making it easier for families to plan for their child's education and access financial benefits. Ontario is working with the federal government to ensure that low-income families are taking advantage of programs like the **Registered Education Savings Program (RESP)** and the **Canada Education Savings Program (CESP)**.

Moving toward employment and income security

By the numbers

Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training:

In 2017, the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) remained steady at 11.1 percent.

Long-Term Unemployment:

In 2017, the number of adults who have been unemployed for long periods decreased by 6,800 from 2016.

Poverty Rates of Vulnerable Populations:

In 2015, the percentage of persons in vulnerable groups, such as recent immigrants and unattached individuals aged 45 to 64, living in poverty decreased by 4.2 points to 28.4 percent.

Ontario's economy continues to outperform all G7 countries in GDP growth. In 2017, the unemployment rate dropped to 6.0 percent, a 17-year low, and among the lowest in Canada. [\[4\]](#) However, we know that not all Ontarians are benefiting equally from the strong growth of our economy. That's why we are taking bold action to help people address the challenges they may be experiencing in a changing economy, with a goal of making Ontario a fairer place for all.

Making progress

Helping low-income workers adapt to changing workplaces Globalization and technological advances are changing the way we work and the skills employers are seeking. To help Ontarians adapt and thrive in a changing economy, we are investing in them and modernizing laws regulating the labour force to reflect the opportunities and challenges of the current economy.

We know there has been an increase in precarious work, which can make it difficult to earn a decent income or find employment with decent working conditions. [\[5\]](#) Job insecurity also increases the risk of becoming vulnerable to poverty. The Special Advisors for the **Changing Workplaces Review** defined precarious work broadly as “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.” [\[6\]](#)

The Changing Workplaces Review estimated that about 30 percent of Ontario vulnerable workers are

employed precariously. Populations overrepresented in precarious work include women, visible minorities and workers without a high school diploma.[\[7\]](#)

In response to the recommendations from the Changing Workplaces Review, we introduced the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act. Passed in November 2017, the act will make a broad range of amendments to the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and Labour Relations Act (LRA). This includes ensuring part-time workers are paid the same hourly wage as full-time workers, providing protection against employee misclassification, introducing paid sick days for every worker, and making employee scheduling fairer. The act also seeks to improve the safety and security of survivors of domestic and sexual violence by introducing five days of paid leave.

To help ensure that every Ontarian has the chance to share in Ontario’s prosperity, we have moved ahead with commitments to increase the general **minimum wage** to \$14 per hour on January 1, 2018, and \$15 per hour on January 1, 2019.

Increasing the minimum wage will improve the earnings of over one-quarter of Ontario’s workforce and may help reduce income inequality.

Increasing Ontario’s minimum wage		
January 1, 2017	January 1, 2018	January 1, 2019
\$11.40	\$14	\$15

Connecting job seekers to employment opportunities

In a changing economy, we know that some Ontarians will experience job loss and may benefit from access to retraining or help finding a new career path. In 2017, we announced a \$185 million investment over four years to enhance essential skills programming for adults, as part of the **Lifelong Learning and Skills Plan**. Through this plan, the government is working with its partners to strengthen the adult education system by improving access to programs that match adult learners’ individual needs, making transitions between programs smoother and simpler, and identifying ways to better recognize adult learners’ prior learning and skills.

In addition, the **Employment Service** offers resources, supports and services to respond to career and employment needs of individuals and the skilled labour needs of employers. The program also includes financial supports for individuals to remove barriers to participating in employment services, and financial incentives for employers to provide on-the-job training, including apprenticeship training and work experience opportunities.

We are also exploring new ways to address local labour market issues through **Local Employment Planning Council (LEPC)** pilots in eight communities. **LEPCs** connect employers, different levels of government, service providers, trainers and other local Employment Ontario and non-Employment Ontario partners. They support the improvement of labour market conditions in local communities through enhanced collection and dissemination of local labour market information and community engagement.

The sector-specific **SkillsAdvance Ontario** pilot project provides employers with access to job-ready, skilled workers that meet their workforce development needs. It supports job seekers who are further from the labour market to obtain and advance in employment by providing them with essential, technical and employability skills and on-the-job work experience.

Driving innovation on income security

We recognize the significant long-term opportunities of reforming the income security system to ensure all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and inspired to reach their full potential, and to support the over 900,000 people who rely on social assistance and even more who rely on the broader income security system. We are working to support system transformation in several areas:

In 2016, we established three **Income Security Reform Working Groups**, which included the First Nations Income Security Working Group and the Urban Indigenous Table on Income Security Reform. The three groups developed a roadmap that focuses on needs and sequences and prioritizes actions for the most meaningful impact. “Income Security – A Roadmap for Change” was released in November 2017.

Income security connects all of our efforts to address poverty in Ontario. The recommendations proposed in the roadmap seek to invest in people, address adequacy and recognize the unique experience of Indigenous peoples. The roadmap recognizes the importance of transforming social assistance to improve income adequacy and provide people with trauma-informed services that reflect a deliberate culture of trust, collaboration and problem-solving. The working groups gave the Province advice about the actions they believe can help those most affected by poverty, keep others from falling into poverty, and improve our overall prosperity.

We are examining the working groups’ recommendations to reform our Income Security System, and developing an action plan guided by their vision and recommendations.

We are also testing innovative, evidence-based approaches to inform our longer term plans to better support people living on low incomes. The **Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP)** is a significant piece of research to complement important elements of Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy, and is testing whether a basic income can better support vulnerable workers, improve health and education outcomes for people on low incomes, and help ensure that everyone shares in Ontario’s economic growth. What we learn from the **OBIP** will inform our longer-term plans for income security reform.

What is Basic Income?

A basic income is a payment to eligible families or individuals that ensures a minimum income level, regardless of employment status.

Designing the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP)

We consulted the Honourable Hugh Segal for advice on how we could best design, deliver and evaluate a basic income pilot. Mr. Segal submitted a discussion paper, which we used to consult with people across Ontario about the design of a basic income pilot.

We received feedback on:

- determining eligibility
- selecting locations
- determining the benefit amount
- delivering results
- evaluating outcomes

From November 3, 2016, to January 31, 2017, we held broad and inclusive consultations with a cross-section of people in Ontario:

- 32,870 people responded to a public survey
- 1,213 responded to the expert survey
- 1,193 people attended in-person meetings in 14 Ontario communities
- 537 written submissions from private citizens and community groups were received

Most individuals who participated in the consultations supported the idea of a pilot that:

- includes a representative sample of participants in selected pilot sites aged 18–64. Many noted it was important to include participants who currently receive social assistance (such as Ontario Works or ODSP)
- includes representative locations that offer a cross-section of social, economic and demographic profiles (e.g., urban, rural and northern locations)
- sets the Basic Income payment at a level that will lift participants out of poverty
- includes implementing a Negative Income Tax model for the pilot that would guarantee a certain level of income

- measures specific outcomes, focused centrally on health, housing, food security and work behaviour

This advice helped us design and launch the OBIP in June 2017 in Hamilton, Brantford and Brant County, Thunder Bay and the surrounding area, and later in Lindsay. Throughout the OBIP, we will be testing how a basic income may help participants living on a low income better meet their basic needs, while improving outcomes in:

- food security
- stress and anxiety levels
- mental health
- health and healthcare usage
- housing stability
- education and training
- employment and labour market participation

The OBIP demonstrates leadership in supporting low-income and vulnerable communities. What we learn from this pilot will help inform our longer-term plans to better support people living on low incomes.

In the short term, we continue to improve income security by:

- increasing social assistance rates for all individuals receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works by 2 percent from September 2017 for ODSP and October 2017 for Ontario Works;
- ending the “clawback” of child support from social assistance payments. In effect from January 2017 for ODSP and February 2017 for Ontario Works, this 100 percent exemption of child support means that approximately 19,000 families, the majority of whom are single-parent households, will see an increase of approximately \$3,380 annually; and
- raising the limits for assets for recipients of ODSP and Ontario Works so individuals and families can build financial resilience and better weather daily cost pressures and unexpected financial needs.

These changes took effect in September 2017.

Raising asset limits for ODSP and Ontario Works

Ontario Works asset limits increased from:

- \$2,500 to \$10,000 for single individuals
- \$5,000 to \$15,000 for couples

ODSP asset limits increased from:

- \$5,000 to \$40,000 for single individuals
- \$7,500 to \$50,000 for couples

Supports for household costs

Rising costs of food, utilities and housing can put pressure on many families and leave them with fewer resources for important family needs. We have taken steps to support low- and moderate-income families who may be struggling to cover the costs of electricity. Through Ontario's **Fair Hydro Plan**, we have ensured that electricity bills will not increase beyond the rate of inflation for four years. We have also increased the amount of financial support available to lower-income households by 50 percent through the **Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP)**, and expanded the program so more people are eligible, including all recipients of Ontario Works and ODSP.

The program provides credits ranging from \$35 to \$113 per month based on household income. As of January 2018, more than \$160 million in credits have been provided to over 220,000 households. Through the Ontario Trillium Benefit, the province is also providing relief on the sales tax on energy for low- and moderate-income households, as well as additional energy credits for seniors and residents living in Northern Ontario.

Leveraging economic growth to expand opportunities

Across Ontario, we are partnering with communities to promote access to economic opportunities and employment. **Community Benefits Agreements** recognize that infrastructure investments should provide benefits for the communities including local employment, training, apprenticeships and local supplier and social procurement opportunities.

The **Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit (LRT)** was the first major transit project to include a community benefits program, under the Community Benefits Framework developed by Metrolinx in partnership with the Toronto Community Benefits Network. Crosslinx Transit Solutions (CTS), the consortium awarded the contract to design, build, finance and maintain the Crosstown, developed and delivered a community benefits program, reviewed and approved by Metrolinx and Infrastructure Ontario, that included Community Benefits and Liaison and Apprenticeship Plans.

Metrolinx also collaborated with a number of key partners to create an Apprenticeship Declaration for the

Eglinton Crosstown project that sets out an aspirational goal to employ apprentices or journeypersons from historically disadvantaged communities to perform 10 percent of all trade or craft working hours on a trade by trade basis, required to construct the project. As of December 2017, 106 persons have been hired in professional, administrative and technical capacities, as well as 41 apprentices, with more expected in the coming years. Looking ahead, Metrolinx is committed to continuing to work with community groups, agencies and other stakeholders to build its community benefits program. The Eglinton Crosstown LRT community benefits program will serve as a guideline for the upcoming Finch West, Hurontario and Hamilton LRT projects.

Social enterprises also offer innovative new ways of operating for public benefit. They often employ people who experience difficulty finding jobs, such as at-risk youth, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, newcomers, or those with mental health or addiction challenges.

We are working with innovators across Ontario to support the development and capacity of financially sustainable and scalable enterprises through the **Social Enterprise Demonstration Fund (SEDF)**. In 2017, we launched the third round of the SEDF with \$5.6 million to support projects to 2020. Social enterprises already benefiting from previous rounds of this funding have helped create 352 new jobs and retained 251 jobs, including many for low-income individuals as well as individuals with mental health or addiction challenges.

Profile: The Old East Village Grocer; a social enterprise with a dual purpose

The Old East neighbourhood in London, Ontario, was a “food desert” without access to fresh, affordable food until Fall 2016, when the Old East Village Grocer (OEVG) came to town. The independent, full-service grocery store is a social enterprise operated by ATN Access for Persons with Disabilities Inc. It provides employment assistance and skills training to adults and youth with disabilities who face multiple barriers when looking for employment by following a simple philosophy: For every person who wants to work, there’s a job out there — and we will help them find it.

The OEVG is a real-life training ground that offers fresh, affordable food choices to residents of Old East London, and provides employment experience and skills training to adults and youth with disabilities. It has become an integral part of an eclectic, revitalizing neighbourhood and an essential service to residents. One regular customer said with a smile: “I guess I must like it, I’m here every day!”

A component of the program is on-the-job training with a local employer, which helps participants develop skills and acquire current experience. However, this model does not work for everyone. Finding placements and employment for individuals who require more intensive support than a for-

profit business is able to provide was often a challenge.

Peggy McKinney, ATN client and OEVG employee, is an older worker who is Deaf. She knows how it feels to have her skills discounted. “Employers often see only your disability and not what you have achieved or what you can accomplish in the future.” For her and over 100 others, the OEVG has provided the opportunity for decent work in an environment where they feel valued for their contributions.

Partners and friends have provided encouragement, advice, sweat equity and financial support to the OEVG over the last four years. It really does take a village.

Supporting all Ontarians to pursue their full potential

We know that young people who are not in school or training and who do not have a job are at risk of becoming stuck in a cycle of poverty, and may face elevated difficulties entering the workforce or be at risk of homelessness. Ontario measures the percentage of young people aged 15–29 who are NEET to ensure that the province’s programs and initiatives designed to target youth are having the desired impact.

In 2017, we continued to build on efforts to empower youth by supporting **Collective Impact for Disconnected Youth**. The approach brings together the private sector, community leaders, organizations and youth aged 15 to 24 in five Ontario communities together to identify mechanisms and opportunities to improve employment, education and well-being outcomes, as well as other local priority issues.

We are also taking action to support the approximately 1.9 million Ontarians with a disability, which represents nearly one in seven individuals. Launched in June 2017, **Access Talent: Ontario’s Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities** aims to increase employment for people with disabilities and connect employers to new talent to grow their businesses.

Access Talent: Ontario’s Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

Access Talent calls on employers with 20 or more employees to hire at least one more person with a disability. This would connect 56,000 people to jobs, increasing employment for people with disabilities looking for work by 30 percent. The strategy also commits to strengthening education, skills development and employment programs to help people with disabilities succeed.

Access Talent is focused on four key pillars:

1. start early
2. engage

3. integrate

4. trail blaze

These pillars will work together to support Ontarians with disabilities by encouraging youth with disabilities, supporting employers looking to employ people with disabilities, and providing seamless integrated employment support services for people with disabilities.

As part of the strategy, the government launched an Employers' Partnership Table to gain perspectives on how to engage businesses across multiple sectors to champion employing persons with disabilities. These actions will continue to establish Ontario as a leader in accessibility.

Local Poverty Reduction Fund Profile: Up With Women

Up With Women helps homeless and at-risk women on social assistance to permanently exit poverty by helping them build sustainable careers and businesses. Women in the program, including those with disabilities or those leaving situations of domestic abuse, undergo a year-long intensive program of strategic career development. They are partnered with highly skilled business leaders and professionals for bi-weekly professional coaching, group development and focused workshops.

This helps them attain more than "survival employment" which is a short-term intervention because women, especially those with children, in minimum-wage jobs struggle to provide for their families. They often remain just a pay cheque away from a return to homelessness.

With support from the fund, Up With Women evaluated its programs to measure the overall effectiveness, and found promising approaches to securing meaningful employment and income for vulnerable women. These findings will support the continual refinement of Up With Women's programs as it expands to five new locations in Ontario.

Through the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, we have been working closely with organizations serving immigrants and refugees, the Federal government and municipalities to ensure an effective response to the needs of the growing number of refugees and vulnerable newcomers settling in Ontario. In 2017, Ontario received approximately 10,000 resettled refugees, more than double the average annual arrivals between 2005 and 2014, and over 19,000 refugee claimants, continuing an upward trend since 2013.

Recognizing that refugees have complex needs and require targeted support to succeed, Ontario invested

an additional \$18.5 million in 2017 to enhance social and economic integration supports for vulnerable newcomers. This funding is supporting targeted services, including immediate newcomer settlement and long-term integration supports, to improve social and economic outcomes for refugees and other vulnerable newcomers. Over 20,000 refugees will benefit from new programs and services that provide settlement, case management and mental health services, employment support, occupation-specific training, language learning, job placements and entrepreneurship, as well as programming tailored to the needs of newcomer women and youth. This is in addition to our ongoing annual investments of over \$100 million in newcomer and refugee supports, including settlement, language training and employment services.

Success Stories: Up With Women

Claudette

Claudette worked in reconciliations at a major financial firm when two major events upended her life. She had to leave her office job due to a physical disability that causes her hands to shake and prevents her from being able to write. She also left an abusive husband. She and her three children had nowhere to go.

Interval House's "BESS" program referred her to Up With Women. She turned a love of baking into a part-time job with support from her coach. Then she negotiated with a bakery to share their space to launch her own baking and catering business. By the end of the program, she secured a deal with Bruno's Fine Foods and was meeting with Bombardier.

Success Stories: Up With Women

Sarah

Sarah, a former sex worker, survived sexual and physical violence, overcame addiction, and found safe housing. She now has a part-time job and is working toward acceptance into law school.

"Because of Up With Women, I feel like I have my life back"

In addition, we launched the **Refugee Resettlement Secretariat**, which works across government to reduce barriers for refugees and ensure access to services such as health care, including mental health supports, education and employment training. The Secretariat is tracking outcomes to identify where additional supports may be needed.

Moving forward

Building on progress, we are committed to helping support all people in Ontario to achieve income security

and employment. A key highlight includes:

- developing a **Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy** to help break down barriers that limit women's economic equality.

Ending Homelessness and investing in affordable housing

By the numbers

Ontario Housing Measure:

In 2015, there was a 16 percent decrease in the number of low-income households with children under the age of 18 spending more than 40 percent of their income on housing costs.

Ontario is committed to ending chronic homelessness by 2025 and to improving affordable housing for all Ontarians. We are working towards a common goal of ensuring Ontarians have a safe and affordable place to live, and are building on the province's commitment to strong, thriving communities.

Making progress

Ending chronic homelessness

In response to the Report of the Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, *A Place to Call Home*, four priority areas have been adopted to guide provincial action to prevent, reduce and end homelessness:

1. chronic homelessness
2. youth homelessness
3. Indigenous homelessness
4. people transitioning out of provincially funded institutions and service systems, such as correctional facilities, hospitals, child welfare and youth justice systems, and shelters for women who have experienced violence.

Ontario's **Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS) Update** is based on a vision that every person has an affordable, suitable and adequate home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family and build strong communities. This vision is associated with two key outcomes:

1. a decrease in the number of people who are homeless
2. an increase in the number of households achieving housing stability.

As part of the strategy update, Ontario committed to providing survivors of domestic violence with more housing options through a portable housing benefit and making improvements to the **Special Priority Policy (SPP)**, which provides priority access to social housing for survivor households fleeing an abusive situation in circumstances when they cannot afford rent in the private market, preventing them from becoming vulnerable to homelessness.

A major investment under the LTAHS Update is the **Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit Pilot**. The pilot, launched in September 2016, committed \$20 million to help survivor households who qualify for SPP with access to safe and affordable housing. Households that participate in the program have the option to receive a portable housing benefit, so that they can immediately find housing instead of waiting for a social housing unit to become available. This alleviates many of the financial challenges survivors have in finding affordable housing. Since the launch, over 770 survivors and their families have received assistance under the benefit. The pilot has been effective in providing a viable alternative to social housing for survivors, giving them more choice as to where to live, helping them find housing more quickly, and providing greater housing stability.

What is chronic homelessness?

Chronic homelessness is the state of being homeless for six months or more in the past year. People in these circumstances often have disabling conditions, such as chronic physical or mental illness or substance abuse problems. Repeated episodes of violence and abuse cause trauma, which increases people's vulnerability and may lead to chronic homelessness. Life on the streets and in shelters over the long term makes people who are chronically homeless vulnerable to serious health crises, violence and criminal justice system involvement. That is why Ontario is focused on providing housing and supports that will help end chronic homelessness over the longer term, along with emergency services that provide critical short-term emergency supports for these vulnerable individuals.

In April 2017, the provincial budget committed \$30 million over the next three years to expand the pilot to eventually support up to 3,000 survivors of domestic violence and survivors of human trafficking across the province. Starting in 2019, funding will increase to \$15 million annually.

To further meet commitments to survivor households, Ontario made amendments to the SPP that expand the policy to include survivors of human trafficking, improve the application process for survivor households, and ensure the policy is relevant, culturally inclusive and reflects the pattern of abuse experienced by some survivor households. These changes came into effect in early 2018.

Eliminating homelessness requires collaboration between a variety of stakeholders and partners to identify systems-level solutions, as well as solutions tailored to the needs of specific communities. Another

investment designed to address homelessness is the **Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)**, which supports local communities to address homelessness through proactive and permanent solutions. In 2016–17, CHPI helped approximately 32,300 households experiencing homelessness to obtain housing, and approximately 125,500 households at risk of homelessness to remain in their homes. Ontario will provide an additional \$90 million to CHPI over the next three years to help families and individuals stay in their homes or get the housing they need through a wider range of services and homelessness prevention programs.

Funding from CHPI allows for local solutions to homelessness problems and is a key way in which the province helps build capacity to respond to homelessness at the local level. Provincial service managers—municipalities and District Social Services Administration Boards mandated to deliver housing and homelessness programs—have the flexibility to use CHPI funding to create local programs and services under four broad service categories:

1. emergency shelter solutions for people who are experiencing homelessness or are in crisis
2. housing which could include long-term housing and transitional housing, and related supports
3. other services and supports, including street outreach, drop-in centres and transportation
4. homelessness prevention, including emergency financial assistance to help people stay in their homes.

Service managers are also supported in the fight against homelessness through the government's **Home for Good (HFG)** initiative, which focuses on helping youth, Indigenous people, people who are chronically homeless, and those transitioning from provincial institutions to receive housing assistance and support services so that they can obtain and retain stable housing.

Local Poverty Reduction Fund Profile:

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC)

Examining the shift from reducing poverty to increasing prosperity

The OFIFC is using their grant from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund to examine how Friendship Centres support community-defined prosperity and how these supports are substantiated by culturally grounded indicators of success. Examining the holistic infrastructure and associated services and programs at Friendship Centres helps broaden the idea of poverty reduction beyond reducing social and economic gaps individuals and families experience.

Findings so far indicate that land, culture, family, education, health and time inform understandings of prosperity. These could be further applied to support poverty reduction in urban Indigenous communities. After the research is complete, these understandings could be applied in other urban

Indigenous communities across the province.

Prosperity . . . To me it's not about the material. How do I feel? How do I feel about my family, my community? How do I feel in general about where I'm at and how do I rely on the Creator for everything. It's about inside you, your spirit. And when I hear the language it hits me right here . . . not like the English language. Somebody can say that they're poor in English to me...but if you say it in Ojibwe, that means it strips them of everything and they have nothing. And that's the way it is and that's what that word means to me, [in Ojibwe], it means they have nothing. Whether it's money or food or clothing or anything, it takes the whole gamut of what you're talking about, about that person.

The *Ganohonyohk* project examines culturally appropriate methods for urban Indigenous prosperity growth and explores the role and impact of Friendship Centres on community prosperity. In addition, early work suggests that locally specific understandings of prosperity and services, programs and resources should bridge how Indigenous communities define prosperity and how community members access prosperity. Community prosperity will be enhanced through the useful, accessible, community-determined and culturally relevant implementation of initiatives based in Indigenous concepts of prosperity.

Expanding affordable housing and addressing housing affordability

The first step toward preventing and eliminating homelessness is ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live in a home they can continue to afford. The **Mental Health and Addictions Strategy (Open Minds, Healthy Minds)** supports mental wellness at all ages and provides integrated services, including housing supports that help recovery. Between 2014 and 2017, 1,000 supportive housing units for people living with mental health and addictions issues who are homeless or at risk of homelessness were created. In 2017, the government committed to the creation of an additional 1,150 supportive housing units for the same populations over two years.

A significant component of Ontario's goal to end chronic homelessness by 2025 is an **ongoing supportive housing investment** that will assist up to 6,000 families and individuals to obtain housing assistance and supports services, including the construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units over the long term. Supportive housing combines affordable housing with other supports, such as counselling, personal support and life skills training.

At a local level, the province is helping communities with their housing affordability needs through the **Strong Communities Rent Supplement Program**, which provides long-term rent supplement funding to service managers to assist clients on or eligible to be on social housing waiting lists. The program also helps clients with housing costs when finding homes in the private housing market. The program will run until March 31, 2023, with an annual budget of \$50 million. It assisted 6,557 households in 2016.

Profile: Halton HomeShare

Affordable housing is a concern for many people in the region of Halton, including a large and growing senior population. Many seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible, but for those living alone it is difficult to manage some of the tasks involved in maintaining a home. Halton HomeShare offers an option to seniors who would like to age in place but need assistance with household chores.

Halton HomeShare is a partnership between Halton Housing Help, supported by Ontario's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, and regional partners including Halton Region, Burlington Age-Friendly Seniors Council and Community Development Halton.

The partners work collaboratively to match senior Home Providers with Home Seekers, who rent a spare room and provide a service exchange in return for reduced rent. This can include help with lawn maintenance; snow shoveling, house cleaning or services that both the Home Provider and Home Seeker agree to, excluding personal care.

Senior Home Providers like the idea that someone else is sharing their home and available overnight and embrace the opportunity for companionship. Home Seekers, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, appreciate access to affordable rental units, which helps ensure everyone has access to the rental and housing market in a region where housing prices continue to increase.

Interest in Halton HomeShare has grown, and while the program is new, program participants and seniors acknowledge that this might be a solution that empowers them to remain independent and in their home communities, while helping Home Seekers find affordable rental options within Halton. Through this program, Halton Housing Help and the Halton HomeShare can work toward ensuring that vulnerable people are able to stay housed and avoid falling into homelessness.

Ontario's Fair Housing Plan helps more people find affordable homes, increases housing supply, protects buyers and renters and brings stability to the real estate market. This helps ensure the rental market is fair and accessible, a particularly important priority as the majority of low-income Ontarians rent.

Improving transitions from provincial institutions

A key to eliminating homelessness is to look at the systems and situations that can lead people into homelessness. People exiting provincial service systems — including the justice system, healthcare, youth justice, child welfare and violence against women shelters — are particularly vulnerable. The transition from provincial service systems and institutions provides the government with a critical point of contact to

help prevent at-risk Ontarians from becoming homeless. The province is addressing these issues by focusing on:

- improving the design and delivery of planning processes when people transition out of provincial service systems;
- removing barriers to successful transitions of at-risk people from provincial institutions into their community;
- enabling successful cross-sectoral partnerships to better support individuals leaving provincial systems; and
- creating a culture of shared responsibility across support organizations.

There is evidence that youth leaving the care of a children's aid society do not do as well as other young adults. The **Youth-in-Transition Worker (YITW) Program** supports youth formerly in the care of children's aid societies navigate the transition from care to adulthood by connecting youth with education, employment, housing, life skills, mental health and other supports in their communities.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is currently funding 66 Youth-in Transition Workers (YITWs) in 49 community agencies across Ontario. To support recent amendments to the Child and Family Services Act that raised the age of protection from 16 to 18 on January 1, 2018, the ministry is currently expanding the YITW program to include 25 new Housing Support Workers dedicated to supporting 16- and 17-year-old youth who enter into a Youth Voluntary Services Agreement with a society and wish to find and retain housing.

Ontario is also improving transitions from the justice system through the **Bail Beds Pilot Program**, which provides community-based "24/7" supervision for higher needs adult individuals who would otherwise be held in custody until their criminal charge is resolved. Specialized staff provide vulnerable populations including Indigenous people or those with mental illness with improved access to housing, medical services, treatment, and supervision in the community. So far, 72 beds are available across Thunder Bay, Barrie, Ottawa, Kitchener and Toronto.

Moving forward

To meet the 10-year goal to end chronic homelessness, Ontario will continue to undertake transformational change through a combination of housing supports, targeted investments and innovative programming. Future activities include:

- **Community Justice Centres (CJCs):** The province will be creating three CJCs in Ontario, designed to integrate justice, health, housing, cultural and social services for low-risk offenders in a community-based facility. CJCs aim to address the root cause of crime and criminal behaviour; these include poverty, homelessness, mental health and addictions issues. These centres also aim

to close service gaps for Indigenous offenders by providing culturally relevant community-based services and supports that are grounded in restorative principles of justice. Ontario will establish CJs in Kenora, London and Toronto.

- **Indigenous Supportive Housing Investment:** The Indigenous stream of the provincial supportive housing investment, which has been in development in partnership with Indigenous partners through the summer and fall of 2017, is expected to roll out in winter 2018.
- **Homeless Enumeration:** As part of Ontario's homeless enumeration approach, service managers will conduct the first province-wide enumeration of people experiencing homelessness in 2018. Throughout 2017, the province provided workshops, resources and training to support service managers as they prepare to enumerate their populations.
- **Indigenous Housing:** Ontario will continue its engagement with the Indigenous Housing Engagement Table and other partners on the development of the Indigenous Housing Strategy.
- **Working with Federal partners on housing:** Ontario is working in partnership with the federal government to finalize details related to key elements of the National Housing Strategy, which was released in November 2017. The province is working with service managers to ensure that the strategy works all across Ontario. This will allow us to jointly move forward to develop new affordable housing, prevent homelessness and preserve the existing social housing stock for future generations.
- **Social Housing Modernization:** Ontario is working to modernize its social housing programs to be more efficient, people-centred, outcomes-focused and sustainable so it can better serve tenants and meet current and future realities.

Working with Indigenous partners

Ontario is supporting a brighter future for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. As part of *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous People*, we are investing \$250 million on programs and actions focused on reconciliation developed and evaluated together with Indigenous partners. Many of the actions and programs associated with *The Journey Together* will help alleviate poverty – new programs that support children and youth, as well as strengthened mental and health supports for Indigenous communities.

Making progress

Advancing supports that affirm Indigenous youth and communities

As identified in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report and Calls to Action, there is often a disparity in outcomes experienced by Indigenous communities, which is one of the reasons why we have made it a priority to improve the social, economic and health outcomes for Indigenous people, working in

partnership with local communities. One area of focus is to support Indigenous youth to succeed in learning through the **Indigenous Education Strategy**.

The Indigenous Education Strategy supports an education system that reflects the unique and diverse experiences and histories of Indigenous communities, and focuses on improving well-being and learning among Indigenous students in provincially funded schools, and supports transitions to postsecondary, education, training or workplaces. The strategy includes a framework with 10 performance measures that support poverty-reduction efforts, such as graduation rates, students' self-esteem and participation of First Nation, Métis and Inuit parents in the education of their children.

Ontario is also committed to strengthening Indigenous controlled and governed programs and services that are responsive to the diverse needs and perspectives of Indigenous learners. **Indigenous Institutes** provide opportunities for Indigenous students who may not otherwise have accessed Ontario's postsecondary education and training system to develop the skills they need to succeed in Ontario's highly skilled workforce, while narrowing the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

On December 14, 2017 the Indigenous Institutes Act came into force which recognizes Indigenous Institutes as one of the pillars of Ontario's postsecondary education and training system, and is the result of a joint policy co-creation process between the Indigenous Institutes, the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium and the provincial government.

The Act provides a framework for ongoing collaboration between Ontario and Indigenous Institutes and supports a strong, independent Indigenous Institutes sector, overseen by an Indigenous controlled and governed council. The council would, among other functions, provide quality assurance for post secondary diplomas, certificates and degree programs offered by Indigenous Institutes.

While developing a more inclusive education system is a central part of our efforts to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, we know there is much more that government, including the provincial government, can do to support the health, well-being and resiliency of Indigenous communities. We recognize that many communities are experiencing mental health emergencies and acknowledge the impact of the legacies of colonialism, residential schools and intergenerational trauma.

We have taken immediate action to provide additional supports to youth, families and communities. We are investing in **Indigenous Youth Life Promotion and Suicide Prevention Initiatives**, including the roll out of 19 mobile Mental Wellness Teams serving over 100 First Nations communities in 2017. The teams are complemented by clinical, cultural and land-based programming that promotes early identification and interventions that can help support the emotional well-being of Indigenous children and youth, and lead to better health outcomes and improved school achievement.

In addition to the \$19 million over three years that Ontario is investing in new mental health and addictions

supports, as well as the \$18.6 million to establish new or expanded Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions Treatment and Healing Centres, Ontario is taking steps to **provide enhanced training supports for Indigenous Mental Health and Addictions Workers** through a Professional Development Fund and mobile training teams that support mental health workers at sites throughout Northern Ontario. To date, over 1,200 workers have been trained by the mobile teams, which combined with the fund, support organizations to equip staff with the knowledge and tools to support local needs and community priorities.

In 2017, Ontario established a new **Indigenous Youth and Community Wellness Secretariat** to work closely with Indigenous partners and governments to coordinate efforts and resources that will help youth and communities move beyond crisis response toward recovery and wellness. With offices in Thunder Bay and Toronto, the Secretariat and partners are co-developing an Action Plan that will focus on initiatives that support safety, recovery, wellness, and improved coordination across governments and in communities.

Indigenous women continue to face unacceptable levels of discrimination and economic barriers. On average, Indigenous women earn 25 percent less than Indigenous men, and 43 percent less than non-Indigenous men. They are also more than three times more likely to experience violence, and two and a half times more likely to experience spousal violence than non-Indigenous women. Violence against Indigenous women is strongly linked to socio-economic inequalities, marginalization and discrimination rooted in colonization.

In February 2016, **Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence against Indigenous Women** was launched to respond to some of these issues. The strategy was co-developed and is currently being implemented in collaboration with Indigenous partners. As an investment under both Walking Together and the Ontario Indigenous Children and Youth Strategy, we are providing \$80 million over three years to First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and urban Indigenous partners through the Family Well-Being program to hire frontline workers to design and deliver culturally grounded, prevention- and community-based programming to support women at risk of violence and to improve the overall wellbeing of children, youth and families.

Circle Hearings

Poverty affects individuals and communities in different ways. It is therefore critical to understand a person's unique circumstances and the systemic barriers that may be present. As part of Ontario's commitment to reconciliation, and to help address the circumstances faced by Indigenous parole applicants, the Ontario Parole Board (OPB) holds circle hearings to consider whether the applicant is suitable for early release. A circle hearing is an alternative method to a mainstream parole hearing and is conducted with the same desired outcome, which is to determine if an applicant is suitable for reintegration within the community while prioritizing public safety. As part of recent

enhancements, circle hearings are now always led and facilitated by Elders who are considered the keepers of Indigenous knowledge and hold critical roles in Indigenous communities. Applicants take as much or as little time as they need to address the Board, describing the circumstances that led them to their involvement related to the current offences, and details of the plan they have prepared for release. By better understanding the unique circumstances of an Indigenous applicant, the OPB facilitates a strengthened reintegration into the community, addressing issues that may contribute to the cycle of poverty.

Recognizing that poverty continues to disproportionately impact Indigenous communities, we launched a dedicated Indigenous stream as part of the **Local Poverty Reduction Fund**. The stream focuses on community-level projects designed to help communities gain a better understanding of strategies and interventions that improve lives. To date, we have invested approximately \$11 million in 24 community-driven programs from Indigenous communities and Indigenous-led organizations that measurably improve the lives of those most affected by poverty.

We are also investing to support Indigenous community-based cultural activities and ways of life through the **Indigenous Culture Fund (ICF)**. Launched in the summer of 2017, the ICF is a new \$5 million annual fund that aims to support Indigenous peoples in: conducting community-based activities that foster well-being and resilience; engaging in and sharing cultural practices, knowledge and learning; and revitalizing Indigenous languages. The ICF will ensure Indigenous communities and organizations are able to increase the number of new or enhanced cultural activities on and off reserve and in urban, rural and remote communities. Created through a process of extensive outreach and collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations, the fund is administered by the Ontario Arts Council, on behalf of the Province.

Enabling economic development

Supporting resilient and economically thriving Indigenous communities is a priority for our government. Locally led economic development helps alleviate poverty, particularly in remote and northern Indigenous communities. To help close the socio-economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, Ontario is investing \$95 million over ten years in the **Indigenous Economic Development Fund**. Between 2014–15 and March 31, 2017, the fund has helped create and sustain approximately 846 jobs, facilitated the launch of 152 businesses and helped 511 Indigenous persons access training.

The fund includes three streams, including:

- a **business and community fund** to enhance business support services provided by Aboriginal Financial Institutions in Ontario, as well as providing grants and loans for innovative start-up and Indigenous-owned small and medium-sized businesses;
- **economic diversification** grants that support development and implementation of projects that

support economic activity in new and emerging sectors; and

- **regional partnership grants** that aid projects designed to improve access to skills trainings.

In addition, the **Métis Voyageur Development Fund (MVDF)** provides grants and loans to Métis entrepreneurs and businesses to start or expand their businesses, promote skills development, facilitate partnerships and joint ventures, and create jobs. Since 2012, the MVDF has provided over \$18 million in loans and contributions, as well as leveraging over \$16 million to create or sustain over 340 jobs.

Economic development, food security and community well-being are often strengthened and sustained by infrastructure that connects Indigenous communities with other nearby population centres. That is why, as opportunities to develop the Ring of Fire in Northwestern Ontario are explored, we are prioritizing efforts to connect remote Indigenous communities with the provincial highway network.

We are working with Webequie, Marten Falls and Nibinamik First Nations **to plan and construct year round road access** to their communities and into the proposed Ring of Fire developments. Communities are working to begin environmental assessments of the recently announced road projects and plan to begin construction in 2019, following all necessary approvals.

Local Poverty Reduction Fund Profile:

Reducing intergenerational poverty in Ontario's northernmost community

Fort Severn First Nation is Ontario's most northerly community. Many members live close to the land where hunting, fishing and gathering on their traditional lands remain a critical part of the Cree Way of Life. The Cree share their traditional lands with the caribou, the sturgeon and Ontario's last two remaining polar bear populations.

With support from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, we are starting to provide community support to young mothers to help break the cycle of poverty for them and their children.

Community Elders, "Aunties" and educators will use tools and techniques from Cree, western models and those from India, Africa and the developing world, to help these mothers complete their high school education and develop better parenting skills

"This is important because we know that community members with a high school diploma can access training to find jobs in the emerging technological sector including telecommunications and broadband applications such as telemedicine and digital education," Chief Paul Burke said.

"Without a high school diploma, the primary source of income is social assistance. With funding from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, we plan to change that."

The Elders, Chief and Council recognize that when young women become pregnant they often

drop out of school and never return, and that their children grow disinterested in school as they grow up.

This project is an intervention that brings almost all the members of our community together to support these young mothers and their children to get their education and reach their potential.

The Learn and Uplift Foundation of Toronto will support this work by building community capacity to hold community consultation and will share online learning expertise to develop customized skill development and learning tools for our youth and children.

Moving forward

Aligned with our commitments through *The Journey Together*, we are working collaboratively with Indigenous partners to identify and break down barriers and support community priorities. Looking ahead to the coming year, Ontario is engaged in many important actions, including:

- Developing an **Indigenous focused anti-racism strategy**, as part of the broader 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategy
- Launching an **Urban Indigenous Action Plan** to guide government and the broader public service to develop responsive, inclusive policies, programs and evaluations that meet the needs of urban Indigenous communities. The Urban Indigenous Action Plan is being co-developed in partnership with the [OFIFC](#), the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), and with input from urban Indigenous communities across Ontario.
- Recognizing the intrinsic connection between supporting improved social and economic outcomes for Indigenous people and the goal of reconciliation, we are developing an implementation plan that responds to the recommendations from the First Nations Income Security Reform Working Group, and Urban Indigenous Income Security Reform Table, as part of the 10-year **Income Security Roadmap**.
- Continuing to implement Ontario's **First Nations Health Action Plan**, through an initial three-year investment of \$222 million, followed by sustained funding of \$104.5 million annually to ensure Indigenous people have access to more culturally appropriate care and improved health outcomes. Examples of actions include increasing funding for physician services in Northern Ontario, providing cultural competency training for front-line health care providers, and improving access to home and community care services for Indigenous communities across the province.
- Introducing a **Northern Ontario Agri-Food Strategy**, under the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, which includes a strategic objective of increasing opportunities for Indigenous people and communities to participate in economic development in the agri-food sector.

Developing Ontario's Food Security Strategy

While Ontario has one of the world's best food systems, physical access to sufficient, nutritious food is inconsistent across the province. Northern and remote First Nations communities pay much higher prices for food due to higher transportation costs, limited retail competition on reserves, and limited local food production opportunities. Improved access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food can help individuals and households realize their potential and improve health and well-being. We know that food insecurity is a core symptom of poverty, which is why our wider efforts to reduce poverty are tied to our food security strategy.

In 2016, the Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy was mandated to develop a food security strategy that addresses access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, including in remote First Nations communities, by working with the ministers of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and Children and Youth Services. In 2017, the government launched an online survey and hosted and attended in person meetings to give Ontarians a chance to help us develop the strategy. This included an Indigenous specific food security questionnaire to solicit Indigenous input on the development of the provincial food security strategy and help gather information on key issues, barriers and challenges to food security, as well as to better understand Indigenous perspectives on promising practices and community-led solutions. Over 400 people shared their ideas.

In addition, through the social enterprise accelerator program we have helped six food security social enterprises gain capacity to raise investments to support their initiatives. We have also invested \$5 million in funding for 14 Local Poverty Reduction Fund projects that will increase food security across the province, including \$2.8 million for seven projects focused on food security within Indigenous communities.

Ontario's first-ever food security strategy will support initiatives that help make it easier for people and families to access nutritious, culturally appropriate food. It will also support poverty reduction and income security initiatives. We know that communities have been doing great work to improve access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food. Our strategy will help increase impact at the local level by strengthening partnerships across sectors, and will build on our leadership by supporting innovative, collaborative, locally based actions on food access and food security.

Measuring our success

Monitoring and evaluating progress is a key part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy. We need to

measure our success to help identify what might be working and where enhanced support and collaboration are needed. Indicators highlight that we are making progress across a range of measures, including decreases to child poverty and higher graduation rates. The indicators also tell us that some Ontarians continue to experience major barriers and need our support.

PRS Indicator 1: Child Poverty Target (Fixed LIM-50) - Progress

Ontario is working toward the target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 percent in five years. In 2016, we shifted to a 2012 baseline from 2008 following the change to Statistics Canada's income survey. We also committed to separately report on progress made from 2008 to 2011 on reducing child poverty measured against the initial 2008 target (see sidebar below).

As in past years, the Poverty Reduction Strategy measures child poverty through the PRS fixed low-income Measure (PRS LIM-50). The LIM-50 measures the number and percentage of children under 18 living in a household with an income below the fixed LIM poverty line. This line is one half of the median household income in the 2012 base year and is adjusted for consumer price index inflation for subsequent years. Household income is adjusted for household size. It's important to note that the child poverty indicators are measured with a two-year data lag, so the most recent data is from 2015.

The latest available findings indicate that we are rapidly approaching our target of reducing the number of children living in poverty by 25 percent and that we have reduced the number of children living in deep poverty by over 37 percent since 2012 (see PRS Indicator 2). Between 2014 and 2015, 19,000 children were lifted out of poverty as measured by the LIM-50. From the 2012 baseline, this represents a decrease of 123,000 children or 24.4 percent. The annual rate of child poverty, which is a measure of the percentage of children living in households below the fixed-LIM 50, has also steadily decreased from 18.9 percent in 2012 to 14.4 percent in 2015.

Table 5.1 – Child Poverty Target

Year	Number of children below Fixed-LIM 50	Percentage reduction in number of children in poverty since 2012	Rate of child poverty
2012	505,000	Base Year	18.9%
2013	498,000	-1.4%	18.7%
2014	401,000	-20.6%	15.1%
2015	382,000	-24.4%	14.4%

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey

PRS Indicator 2: Depth of Poverty (Fixed LIM-40) - Progress

Data from 2015 highlights continued and significant reductions in the number of children living in deep poverty. Depth of poverty is measured through the fixed PRS LIM-40, indexed to a baseline year of 2012. The indicator provides information about the number and percentage of children living in households with income of less than 40 percent of the median household (as opposed to 50 percent of the median household income of PRS Indicator 1). This indicator captures the population with the fewest resources.

Table 5.2 – Depth of Poverty

Year	Number of children below Fixed-LIM 40	Percentage reduction in number of children in deep poverty since 2012	Rate of deep poverty
2012	316,000	Base Year	11.8%
2013	289,000	-8.5%	10.9%
2014	220,000	-30.4%	8.3%
2015	198,000	-37.3%	7.5%

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey

In 2015, there was a reduction of 22,000 children living in deep poverty from 2014. Since 2012, a total of 118,000 children have been lifted out of deep poverty, which is equivalent to a 37.3 percent reduction. This reduction highlights that government investments, including the Ontario Child Benefit, are making a difference to some of the most vulnerable families in Ontario.

2008-2011 Child Poverty Target Progress

Last year, we committed to continue reporting on progress made towards the child poverty target set against the initial 2008 base year for both the child poverty target, and depth of poverty indicator.

Child Poverty Target, 2008-2011

Year	Number of children below Fixed-LIM-50	Percentage reduction in child poverty since 2008
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2008	423,000	Base Year
2009	423,000	0%
2010	408,000	-3.5%
2011	402,000	-5%

Depth of Poverty, 2008-2011		
Year	Number of children below Fixed-LIM-40	Percentage reduction in deep child poverty since 2008
2008	248,000	Base Year
2009	202,000	-18.5%
2010	202,000	-18.5%
2011	228,000	-8%

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance, using the Statistics Canada's revised data set for Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), 2008-2011. As previously reported, the number of children has been updated since 2008 due to revisions of the SLID data made by Statistics Canada.

PRS Indicator 3: Birth Weights - Steady

In 2016–2017, 80.6 percent of babies were born at a healthy weight, which is steady from 2015–2016 where 80.8 percent of newborns had a healthy weight.^[8] We measure the percentage of newborns born at what is a considered healthy weight as babies born to low-income families are more likely to be born below or above normal weights. Research has shown that babies born at weights outside the normal range may face risk factors that can increase their chances of poor health later in life.

PRS Indicator 4: School Readiness - No new data

We know that high-quality early learning and child care experiences are positively related to child development outcomes. This is particularly true for vulnerable children. The **Early Development**

Instrument (EDI) is a population measure of early childhood development in the areas of:

- physical health and well-being;
- social competence;
- emotional maturity;
- language and cognitive development; and
- communication and general knowledge.

The EDI is a questionnaire completed by teachers for senior kindergarten students. The EDI is collected in Ontario every three years, with data last collected in 2015. Findings from that year indicated that 70.6 percent of students were developmentally ready. This was a decline compared to 72.4 percent of students in the previous reporting period (2010–12). Improvements were noted between 2010–2012 and 2015 in the areas of communication and general knowledge, as well as cognitive development. Readiness scores in the other areas of development declined.

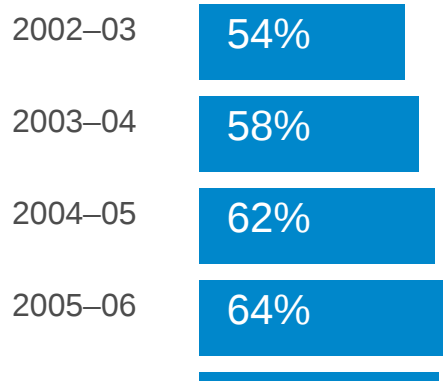
2015 was the first province-wide EDI collection in a single year so it is possible that the change in the data collection process may have contributed to these results. The next province-wide EDI collection will take place in 2018.

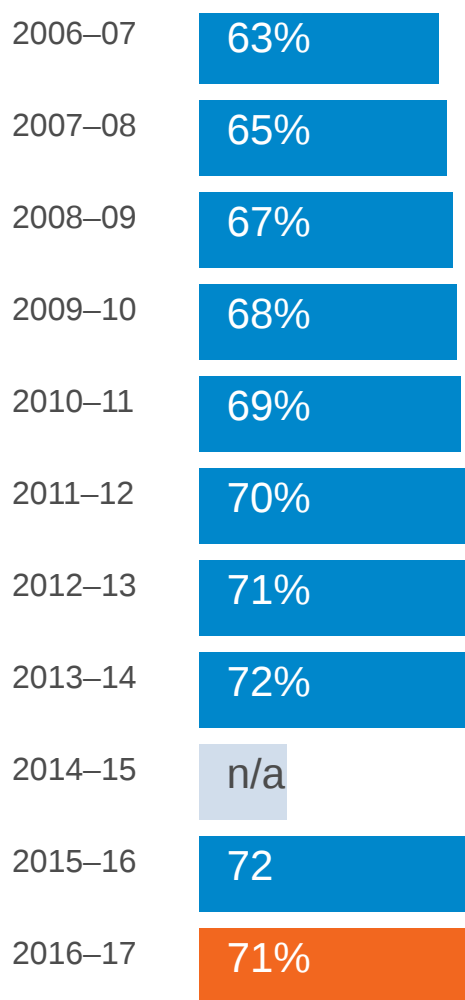
PRS Indicator 5: Educational Progress - Steady

We know that succeeding in school helps position students for success later in life, and can make students less vulnerable to poverty as they transition to adulthood. That is why we monitor elementary student performance through student literacy and numeracy assessments administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) for grade 3 and 6 students.

In 2016–17, 71 percent of the EQAO assessments of student performance in reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 3 and 6 combined met or exceeded the provincial standard. This remains consistent with results in 2015–16, and represents an increase of 17 percentage points from 54 percent in 2002–03. The provincial standard in Ontario is a “Level 3” or equivalent to a “B” grade.

Table 5.3 — Educational Progress





Source: Ontario Ministry of Education, Education Quality and Accountability Office

PRS Indicator 6: High School Graduation Rates - Progress

Students who graduate high school are more likely to find meaningful employment and have greater earning potential throughout their lives compared to those who do not graduate. As noted in the Changing Workplaces Review Report, workers with less than a high school diploma represent close to 61 percent of Ontarians in precarious work situations. As individuals in these situations are more vulnerable to financial insecurity and poverty, it is important that more students in the province graduate from high school. Ontario graduation rates increased to 86.5 percent in 2016, slightly above the 85.5 percent graduation rate in 2015. The five-year graduation rate has increased by more than 18 percent over the last 12 years (since 2004), with 68 percent of students graduating from high school within five years of starting grade 9.

PRS Indicator 7: Ontario Housing Measure - Progress

The Ontario Housing Measure measures the percentage of households with children under 18 with incomes below 40 percent of the median household income and paying more than 40 percent of their income on housing. This indicator helps us show the pressure housing costs are putting on low income families in the province.

The results of the Ontario Housing Measure indicate an improvement in housing affordability for families in poverty, with 15,000 fewer low income families (a 16 percent decrease) spending more than 40 percent of their income on housing in 2015 than in 2014. For 2015, 5.3 percent (or 77,000 households) met both the household income and shelter criteria, out of 1,455,000 Ontario households with at least one child under 18. This represents a notable decrease from the previous year when 6.3 percent, or 92,000 households, met both criteria, out of 1,459,000 households with at least one child.

PRS Indicator 8: Youth Not In Employment, Education or Training (NEET) - Steady

Young people who are not in school or training and who do not have a job are at risk of becoming stuck in a cycle of poverty. Ontario measures the percentage of young people aged 15–29 who are NEET to ensure that the province's programs and initiatives designed to target youth are having the necessary impact.

In 2017, 11.1 percent of youth were NEET, which is consistent with 2016. Investments that the government is currently undertaking to increase the number of youth in education, such as the transformation of OSAP, are helping students from more low- and moderate income families pursue postsecondary studies.

PRS Indicator 9: Long Term Unemployment - Steady

Long-term unemployment is defined as the percentage of adults in the labour force aged 25-64 who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or more. Long-term unemployment is important to track, as finding a job becomes more difficult the longer a person remains unemployed, making it harder to leave poverty and leaving people more susceptible to entering poverty. As with our NEET indicator, keeping track of long-term unemployment among working-aged Ontarians helps measure the success of the province's investments in helping residents find and secure work.

This year, the number of adults who have been unemployed for long periods accounted for 1.2 percent of the labour force; this represents a decrease of 6,800 adults from 2016.

PRS Indicator 10: Poverty Rates of Vulnerable Populations – Varied Outcomes

Ontario tracks poverty among vulnerable population groups that have had historically higher poverty rates than the rest of the population. These groups are also at risk of being in persistent poverty over a number of years. We measure the percentage of adults in five populations considered to be vulnerable who have a household income of less than half the median income (LIM-50). The five vulnerable groups included within this indicator are:

1. recent immigrants
2. persons with disabilities
3. persons in female lone parent families

4. unattached individuals aged 45 to 64
5. Indigenous people living off-reserve.

The most recent data shows that rates of poverty among vulnerable populations varied by group in 2015. The overall percentage of persons in vulnerable groups experiencing poverty decreased from 32.6 percent in 2014 to 28.4 percent in 2015. It should be noted, however, because of the small sample size of each subpopulation, changes across years within each group may be volatile, and caution should be exercised in interpreting the changes. Findings for the sub-populations are as following:

Table 5.4 – Poverty rates among Total Population (%)

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015
Population Below LIM 50 (16+)	13.6	13.3	13.2	13.9

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance using Statistics Canada Canadian Income Survey. Note that Statistics Canada's relative low-income measure is used in this table.

Table 5.5 – Poverty rates among Vulnerable Groups (%)

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015
Total Vulnerable Groups Below LIM-50* (16+)	31.4	30.8	32.6	28.4
Persons with Disabilities	20.8	19.9	18.2	22.8
Recent Immigrants	30.8	27.0	32.4	25.1
Unattached Individuals 45 to 64	31.6	37.1	32.2	37.0
Persons in Female Lone Parent Families	38.6	37.9	38.9	28.9
Indigenous Persons	25.4	20.8	20.9	22.7

Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance using Statistics Canada Canadian Income Survey. Note that Statistics Canada's relative low-income measure is used in this table.

*Note: Due to sampling methods, the total percentage of vulnerable indicator groups does not include persons with disabilities.

PRS Indicator 11: Homelessness Target No data this year

As Ontario has pledged to end chronic homelessness by 2025, indicators are needed to measure progress and to ensure that we are on the right track. A key performance indicator to measure progress on Ontario's homelessness target was introduced last year. The indicator is defined as the rate of chronic homelessness per 10,000 people.

In December 2016, Ontario passed legislation that requires the province's 47 service managers to conduct local homeless enumeration starting in 2018. Enumeration will provide information about the scope of homelessness in communities across the province and some of the characteristics of people experiencing homelessness to better understand their service needs. To conduct enumeration, service managers will identify places where people experiencing homelessness gather or are likely to seek shelter or services. Once these places are located, teams assigned by service managers will identify people who are or may be experiencing homelessness and ask if they would be willing to answer questions as part of the data collection process. Local enumeration data will be available in late 2018 and will be used to calculate a baseline rate of chronic homelessness for Ontario to help us measure results and drive progress toward our target to end chronic homelessness by 2025.

With that goal in mind, Ontario has been working with service managers in 2017 to build capacity and to assist them in the planning and conducting of their enumeration.

Endnotes

[1] Government of Canada (2017), *Progress for the Middle Class: Fall Economic Statement*, pg. 40.

[2] Statistics provided by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

[3] Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), Canadian Occupational Projection System. Available at: <http://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/>.

[4] See Ontario Labour Market Snapshot at: www.ontario.ca/page/labour-market see also Statistics Canada, Labour force, employment and unemployment levels and rates, by province: www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/indi02g-eng.htm.

[5] C. Michael Mitchell and John C. Murray (May 2017), *The Changing Workplaces Review: An Agenda for Workplace Rights: Final Report*, chapter 3.

[6] Leah Vosko (2010), quoted in C. Michael Mitchell and John C. Murray (May 2017) pg. 41.

[7] Mitchell and Murray, pp. 45-46.

[8] Source: Better Outcomes Registry and Network; Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Indicator Appendix

Indicators		
Number	Indicator	Status
1	Child Poverty Target: The number of children living in poverty decreased by 19,000 in 2015, which represents a total decrease of 123,000 children from 2012.	Progress
2	Depth of Poverty: The number of children living in deep poverty decreased by 22,000 in 2015, representing a 37.3 percent drop from 2012.	Progress
3	Birth Weight: In 2016-2017, 80.6 percent of babies were born at a healthy weight, which is steady from the 2015-2016 where 80.8 percent of newborns had a healthy weight.	Steady
4	School readiness	No new data
5	Educational Progress: In 2016-2017, 71 percent of combined EQAO assessments of student performance in reading, writing and mathematics in grade 3 and 6 met or exceeded the provincial standard. This is consistent with findings from 2015-2016.	Steady
6	High school graduation rates: Ontario's high school graduation rate was 86.5 percent in 2016. The 5 year graduation rate has increased by more than 18 percent over the last 12 years.	Progress
7	Ontario Housing Measure: The results of the Ontario Housing Measure indicate a substantial improvement in housing affordability for families in poverty, with 15,000 fewer low-income families (a 16 percent decrease) spending more than 40 percent of their income on housing in 2015 than in 2014.	Progress

8	Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): In 2017, 11.1 percent of youth were NEET. This is consistent with 2016, where 11.1 percent of youth were also categorized as NEET.	Steady
9	Long-Term Unemployment: Last year, the number of adults who have been unemployed for long periods accounted for 1.2 percent of the labour force; this represents a decrease of 6,800 adults from 2016.	Steady
10	Vulnerable Groups with High Poverty Rates: The percentage of persons in vulnerable groups experiencing poverty dropped from 32.6 percent in 2014 to 28.4 percent in 2015. The percentage of persons with a disability experiencing poverty increased from 18.2 percent to 22.8 percent.	Varied outcomes
11	Homelessness Target:	Data will be available in 2018

Updated: April 3, 2018
Published: April 3, 2018

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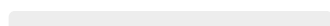
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