

Pre-Budget Consultation Brief

Mojdeh Cox, Executive Director, Pillar Nonprofit Network

We appreciate the importance of consultation, and we arrive here today after inviting feedback from our 1500 members and consulting more deeply with many. A few are presenting with us today or making their own presentations.

We understand the inclination and the need to set priorities. We will propose some. But we also understand and our members will demonstrate today that there are a myriad of needs, and all are important. In the midst of another wave of COVID-19, a great number of people in Ontario are feeling unsafe, ignored or forgotten, perhaps a greater number than ever before. Those of us in the community sector know that this has always been true for some – that everything happens at the margins – and that the pandemic has widened the margins and opened our eyes to how precariously people in Ontario are living and working.

And so, while we normally decry incremental change in favour of broad systems change, because the problems we face are wicked and connected, we also recognize that first among our priorities is to make some progress on all fronts. Because the problems people in Ontario face are connected. Progress in any, but especially in all of them, will change lives.

To take just one example of the ways our members feel this interconnectedness, local Indigenous-led organizations are fighting on many fronts: trying to maintain their usual services to Indigenous people and communities; and also leading and advising our organization and its members on a path to reconciliation; but also providing emergency winter shelter to people experiencing homelessness, disproportionately Indigenous; this after caring for other First Nations people sheltering in the London region while forest fires threaten their homes in the Summer of 2021; and still fighting through jurisdictional excuses for clean drinking water just outside of London, Ontario. We need to make our province safer in so many ways and support the people doing the work of mitigating harm to those left vulnerable.

To address the many needs of the organizations in the community sector, the people doing the work, and the people they serve, acknowledging and addressing all needs will amount to profound change. That said, we are pleased to share our time with members of our network today who will advance particular priority areas and policy suggestions. We are also able to share with you the following priority areas identified through consultation with our members:

- Poverty reduction and increased investment in supportive housing. You will hear policy recommendations today from Pillar member Unity Project for the Relief of Homelessness, and we support those recommendations
- Increased investment in mental health care, including but not limited to harm reduction in addiction services. You will be hearing today from Pillar member London InterCommunity Health Centre, and we support their recommendations
- Invest in women's economic wellbeing. You will be hearing today from Pillar member Gender Coalition of Ontario, and we support their recommendations
- Invest in equity and inclusion by funding initiatives that advance reconciliation and eliminate racism and hate
- Invest in a green transition, cancelling harmful projects and subsidies and reinvesting in green projects and jobs
- Invest in full sector recovery and sustainability through stabilization funds, investments in digital transformation, and targeted funding for unincorporated community organizations

Specific policy recommendations identified by our members and network include:

- Adopt and fund the Calls to Action upon provincial governments from the TRC, especially those to do with child welfare; with education for reconciliation, not limited to establishing senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education; and those calls to action to do with missing children and burial information.
- Adopt and fund the provincial Calls for Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- Allocate funding for land claim settlements.
- Adopt and fund the provincial recommendations made by the National Council of Canadian Muslims on the occasion of the National Summit on Islamophobia, beyond the \$10M committed in the Fall Economic Statement, especially those in the Our London Family Act, once passed.
- Work with Black communities and the federal government to re-establish Ontario's role in eliminating anti-Black racism
- Increase spending on social infrastructure

- Invest in the child care sector by increasing base-funding and making additional investments to prevent nonprofit child care closures; Partner with the federal government to transition to a publicly funded child care system.
- Investment in the education system so that children can learn in smaller classroom settings to avoid repeated school closures during this and future pandemic waves.
- Invest in home and community care for better outcomes and reduced hospital care
- Stabilize enhanced funding for VAW shelters and create a provincewide strategy on gender-based violence.
- Mandate 10 paid sick days immediately and repeal Bill 124.
- Cancel the Highway 413 project and reinvest the estimated \$6 billion of taxpayer funding into public transit.
- Phase out natural gas in Ontario's energy grid, increase investment in energy conservation efforts and invest in renewables and hydroelectric from Manitoba and Quebec to address Ontario's rising costs of electricity while reducing emissions.
- Invest in nature-based climate solutions by going back to pre-2018 level investments in tree planting initiatives in Ontario. This initiative is especially important for London given the historical flooding of the Thames River.
- End fossil fuel subsidies and reinvest the savings in aspects of the Provincial government's "Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations: A Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan" which include investing in increasing energy storage, developing an Emission Reduction Fund, and investing in agricultural solutions.
- Evaluate the impact on emissions when reviewing the draft Ontario Budget to review all decisions that impact Treasury Board decisions in Ontario's "Preserving and Protecting our Environment for Future Generations: A Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan"
- Establish a fund for community sector recovery to increase the visibility of supports for the sector and reduce the reliance on piecemeal programs with unclear eligibility. In the absence of such a fund, create targeted supports for the various subsectors identified in our priority areas, including the specific needs of the arts and performance sectors that will be addressed by Pillar member Eunju Yi of the London Arts Council.
- Introduce \$500 to \$5000 micro-grants for the 50 percent of nonprofits that have no paid staff, delivered through the Ontario Volunteer Centres that support them. Many of these organizations are grassroots initiatives with members from already-underserved populations that maintain themselves and social cohesion in their communities through small projects. They have experienced significant

revenue declines and/or disconnection and typically do not have an existing funding relationship with the Ontario government. Volunteer Centres have stepped up during the pandemic, helping organizations under rapidly changing circumstances. We ask that the federal and Ontario governments work together to cost-share this level of support.

- Establish a council of the community sector responsible to the Premier through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Such a council could help advise the Premier on the sector's readiness as a partner in addressing government priorities and help advise on policy to increase the capacity of civil society to make Ontario a place where all people can succeed. Where we all are safe. Where we all belong.

I thank you for your time, and wish to hand off to my colleagues in the impact sector, Pillar members Tanya Sharma and Rubina Sardar of Champions of Change and then Chuck Lazenby of Unity Project for Relief of Homelessness.

Tanya Sharma and Rubina Sardar, Directors, Champions of Change

- Invest in creating readily accessible funds for organizations focused on youth engagement and/or who offer youth enrichment opportunities in the community to enhance classroom learning
 - Champions of Change targets several of its initiatives towards providing youth with enrichment opportunities beyond a classroom setting to support and enhance their education at school (i.e. personal development workshops, media awareness campaigns, panels/conferences, etc.) We've experienced difficulty acquiring funding for these initiatives that we run due to restrictions on eligibility criteria for grants that we don't qualify for. For example, many grants only accept applications from CRA registered charities, a qualification that Champions of Change does not meet and therefore cannot access those funds. In order to be able to continue providing educational and recreational opportunities for youth engagement in the community, we're asking for increased investment in funds that specifically target youth engagement initiatives, as well as increased accessibility to said funds through more inclusive eligibility requirements. This extends to removing accessibility barriers to funding for girls-specific programming as well. Girls' programs are essential in equipping girls and gender diverse youth with the skills they need to set themselves up for success in the future. Investing in these programs enables organizations that provide girls' programs to improve upon and expand the reach of their program offerings.
- Invest in creating readily accessible funds for member compensation in nonprofit organizations in order to expand their capacity to provide community programming
 - At Champions of Change, we feel our capacity to deliver impactful initiatives in the community is limited due to the lack of funding available for wages to members of nonprofit organizations. As volunteers, we can only dedicate a certain amount of time to Champions of Change on a weekly basis, as we have other compensated commitments that we need to give time to in order to support ourselves. This limits the amount of time we are able to put into our work at Champions of Change, and ultimately hinders our ability to provide community programming.

Chuck Lazenby, Executive Director, Unity Project for the Relief of Homelessness

London has what is openly and widely referred to as a “housing crisis”. Rents have soared in the last few years, while vacancy rates dropped from minimal to miniscule and while more than 6,000 households sit on a waiting list for public housing.

Hundreds more are staying in an ever-expanding shelter system, hundreds more again are sleeping rough/unsheltered, and we fear this crisis will desperately deepen if the eviction freeze is lifted. And, homelessness itself is a health issue of pandemic proportions with the majority of those experiencing homelessness afflicted by trauma, injury, and medical conditions which first marginalize them, and make them susceptible to poverty and homelessness, least able to protect their health and more vulnerable to the worst effects of the virus.

Homelessness is solvable. There are genuine solutions that have been proven to work and that will sustainably address the root issue in a manner that is beneficial to the equity, economy and environment in our province.

The primary and related causes of homelessness is the lack of adequate and affordable housing and the lack of income to afford adequate housing.

Affordable housing with supports is the solution to homelessness; income is the solution to poverty.

In context of a global pandemic, and the additional economic and health hardships this has wrought on communities across the province and here in London, weighing most heavily on marginalized communities, we ask for budget priority to significantly invest in:

- Building quality, low-carbon and affordable social housing and particularly, rent-geared-to-income housing (creating jobs and income in process).
- Raising the Minimum Wage, Ontario Works and Ontario Disabilities Support Program rates, the latter two being left woefully short of economic reality for decades while we have, not surprisingly, seen homelessness develop into a deeper and deeper crisis that affects us all (which will result in fewer rent-arrears and evictions and generally result in local spending and re-investment in local economies).
- Reinstatement of the Basic Income Pilot.
- Housing First supports including Rent Subsidies, and Rent Controls and other means to correct and adjust as homelessness diminishes.

- Commit to continuation of post-pandemic recovery supports to municipalities struggling with desperately increased need in their communities.

From a budget perspective, and aside from the moral and human rights considerations, these investments will see long-term return on investment with savings in expensive social programming including policing, health care, shelters and jails.