



Pre-Budget Submission 2022

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Fred Hahn
President
January 26, 2022

CUPE Ontario Background

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario is the largest Union in the province with more than 280,000 members. CUPE members work in health care, municipalities, school boards, social services, airlines, and post-secondary education. We provide the public services that help make Ontario a great place to live.

CUPE members work on the front lines to protect Ontarians from the pandemic every day. We are in your hospital emergency rooms and ICU's; we are the PSW's in long-term care and retirement homes; we are the paramedics who will get you to the hospital safely when you cannot get there yourself. CUPE members are the staff working in public health, testing and contact tracing. A significant number of CUPE members are also on the front lines supporting Ontarians in the community. We are the shelter workers helping the homeless. We are the child care workers supporting parents, working in essential services. We are keeping children safe at school and helping the most vulnerable students learn. We are the essential service workers who need to report to work to ensure that our communities continue to function: the solid waste collectors, the snow plough drivers, the drinking water specialists, the public transit workers, and the hydro electricians.

CUPE Ontario members have been on the frontline of this pandemic, struggling to provide the critical public services people need. For well over a decade before the pandemic, we have been asking the Ontario government to adequately fund public services, warning that austerity budgets and public service cuts were dangerously weakening critical services like health, education, and social services. Successive governments have ignored those calls, instead, doubled down on the false narrative that it is possible to "do more with less" and cut budgets, especially when considered against inflation, ensuring public services and the front-line workers who provide them were struggling even before the pandemic began.

CUPE Ontario members know we need bold investments in public services and the workers who provide them to not only recover from COVID but to ensure we are ready for future challenges like the pandemic.

Introduction

Two months after Ontario had its first case of COVID-19, Indian activist and author, Arundhati Roy, wrote in the Financial Times that the "pandemic is a portal...a gateway between one world and the next".¹ It was a call to understand the pandemic as an opportunity to interrogate both our past and present, and reimagine our future. It would require us to see what defines our world, not just the pandemic unfolding in front of us, but the longstanding systemic inequalities, failings, and fragilities that have become commonplace. A clear understanding of these challenges would allow us to "break with the past and imagine their world anew."

Roy's words look prophetic when viewed against the last two COVID years. In Ontario alone, there are over 10,000 dead, and at least 1 in every 15 Ontarians have caught COVID-19. Both numbers are undercounts and both numbers are expected to exponentially increase over the coming months.

¹ <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

At first, the virus highlighted our solidarity and interconnectivity as we were all susceptible to its grasp. However, as time went on, a longstanding truth became obvious once again, that while the virus was technically agnostic in terms of who was impacted, socio-economic status meant there were two different pandemics, one for the rich and white, and another for everyone else.

In particular, the pandemic most heavily impacts equity seekers who are marginalized along multiple axes, which magnify their social determinates of health.² They were the ones who were first to be let go or who were “essential” yet low paid and could not work remotely;³ they were the ones who could not afford or were not given proper personal protective equipment (PPE);⁴ they were the ones who had no sick days in times of illness;⁵ they were the ones who lived in heavily racialized neighborhoods which meant they were likelier to contract COVID;⁶ they were the ones who most often lived with pre-existing health conditions which meant they caught and died from COVID disproportionately;⁷ and Black and Indigenous people were the ones with a history of inhumane medical abuse and experimentation which caused understandable vaccine hesitancy.⁸

With all these horrors, COVID has exposed where years of government cuts and underfunding of public services end. Our healthcare system has, on multiple occasions, been on the precipice of enacting critical care triage protocols which will decide who will receive lifesaving care and who will not; our education system has struggled to provide simple basics needed to keep students safe, such as a HEPA filters in each class; and parents are struggling to afford daily necessities as this government has become the sole provincial holdout in signing an agreement with the federal government for \$10 a day child care.

While it is unclear how the COVID crisis will continue to unfold, what is clear is that reforms at the margins will not suffice. Interlinking crises such as inequality, white supremacy, climate change, affordable housing, lack of decent jobs, and COVID, demand wholesale structural change.

There is an appetite for change. Less than 24 months ago we had the largest protest in North American history in support of the Movement for Black Lives. Between 15 and 26 million people marched in the streets in support. We must rethink basic assumptions about what our society should look like.

Traditionally, at the end of a four-year term in office we would ask if we were better off now than four years ago. While the pandemic has changed that calculus of the question, the answer to whether this government deserves another term in office is clear.

It is time for the government to turn the page on not only the last two years of COVID -- where funding for public services and supports for people never rose to meet the challenge -- but also on decades of bad policy decisions by previous governments that have eroded the public services we all need to recover and structurally reinforced historic inequities. Ontarians are counting on their government to imagine a new world. It is time that you deliver.

² <https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health>

³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s6-eng.htm>

⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-covid-black-donations-masks-study-1.5721636>

⁵ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210322/dq210322a-eng.htm>

⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00079-eng.htm>

⁷ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00087-eng.htm>

⁸ <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/193/11/E381>

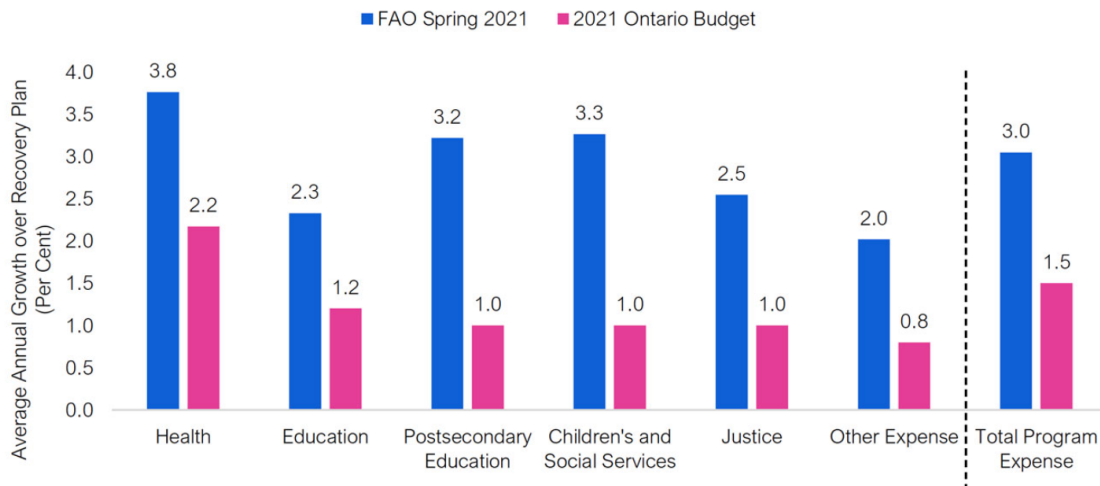
We endorse the submission and remarks made by both the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario.

Fiscal and Economic

After two years of tragic lessons from COVID-19, it is clear, based on the spending plan outlined in the 2021 budget, that the government does not comprehend the gravity of change needed in Ontario.

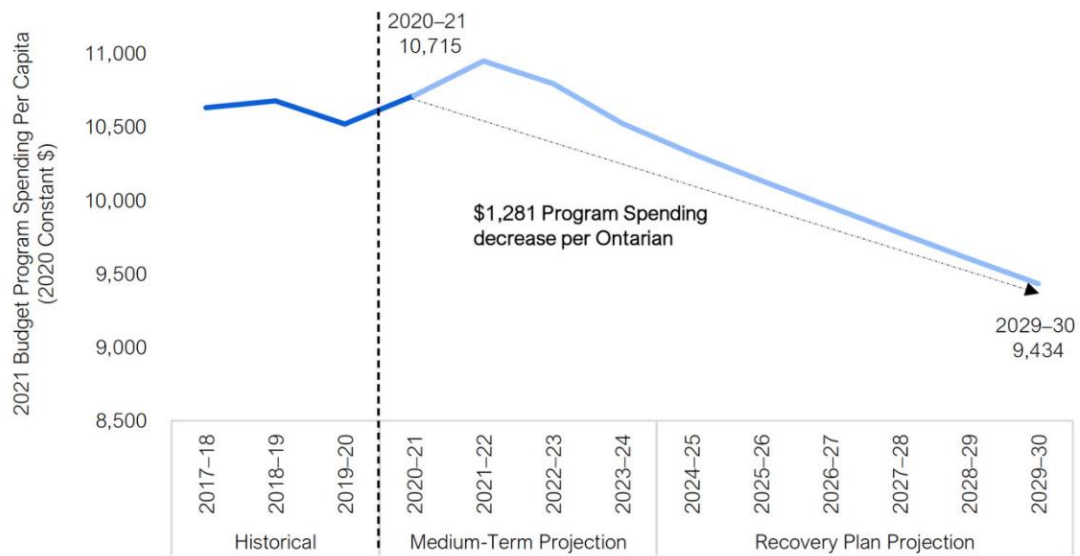
The government's five-year recovery (2024-2029) plan forecasts that average program spending will grow 1.5% annually. However, according to the FAO, program spending that simply meets inflation, population, and demographic changes would require at least a 3% annual increase. This discrepancy would amount to an annual \$1,281 per person reduction in spending by the end of the recovery.⁹

Figure 5-4: Program spending to outpace planned growth over the recovery period



Source: 2021 Ontario Budget and FAO.

⁹ <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-SP2021>

Figure 5-5: Planned program spending per Ontarian decreases \$1,281 by 2029–30

Source: Ontario Public Accounts, Statistics Canada, 2021 Ontario Budget and FAO.

The government has made a commitment that it will not make cuts to existing programs but instead will find efficiencies. According to the FAO, this would require the government to find savings of “roughly \$5 billion by 2023-24” and \$17.8 billion over the ten-year outlook.¹⁰ The budget does not provide details of how these savings would materialize.

Unfortunately, CUPE Ontario members providing vital public services have heard this false narrative from previous governments and have lived experience that shows those “savings” will likely result in reduced services, increasingly crushing workloads due to staffing shortages and stagnant, if not falling, wages for frontline workers.

On the unlikely chance the government did manage to find these savings, this amount of spending would only provide Ontarians with pre-pandemic levels of public services. Pre-pandemic levels of public services did not meet the needs Ontarians’ needs then, and they will not provide sufficient support now. Ontario needs robust public services that will proactively meet the needs of Ontarians in helping to fight our ongoing multiple crises.

To fully understand the impacts of decades of ongoing austerity, it is important to interrogate the one part of the public sector where austerity has not been applied – policing. Policing as a primary method of public safety has disproportionately negatively impacted Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities. Further, Ontarians experience the police as state sanctioned violence and death; for example, in Toronto, where Black people are 20 times more likely to die at the hands of police than white people.¹¹ However, it seems no matter what the issue, funding increased policing is continually used as a catchall solution for community safety, even when supports to other vital public services, like mental health, are widely called for by experts and our communities.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-interim-report-toronto-police-service-inquiry-shows-disturbing-results

While policing exists within all three levels of government, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) is the second largest police force in the country after the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Most workers in the public sector have seen funding for the services they provide, and their wages, eroded by inflation over the course of the last decade. By comparison, funding for the OPP far outpaces inflation, or wages in the public and private sector.

Ensuring community safety must mean defunding the police and, importantly, redirecting those funds to the communities most impacted by the ongoing legacy of this violence.

Recommendations:

- Increase program spending to levels that will help fight our intersecting crises.
- Defund the carceral sector and repurpose those funds to strengthen public services.

Revenue

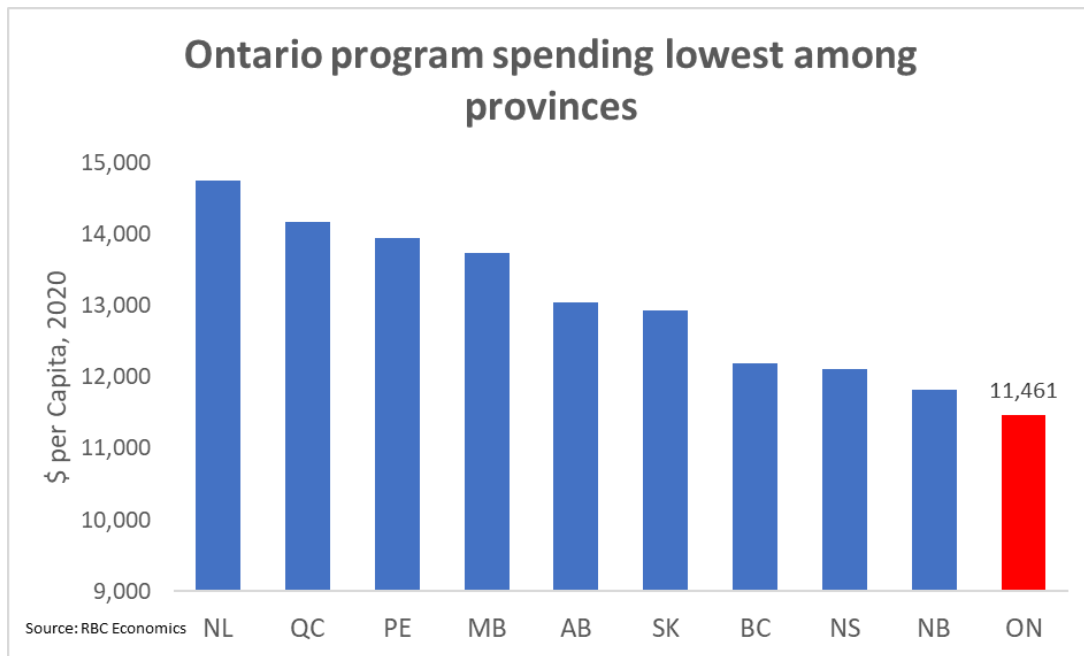
While the pandemic caused a substantial decline in economic activity, Ontario's revenue loss was offset by transfers of almost \$10 billion in COVID funds from the federal government.¹² As the economy rebounds, Ontario's revenues are projected to rise significantly, yet this is not reflected in projected program spending despite the desperate need for investments.

If the proposed austerity is continued and deepened, it would further diminish public services started by the previous Liberal government in 2011 and extend it to a total of almost two decades.

Both the current and previous government have offered explanations of fiscal poverty to justify austerity in Ontario. Unfortunately, these explanations do not reflect the basic facts.

Compared to other provinces, Ontario spends the least amount per person on program spending and regularly generates the least per person on revenue and has for years now.

¹² <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/fed-prov-response-2021>



Prior to the pandemic, government expenditures as a portion of GDP had shrunk over the last 15 years. This means that the economy is growing at a much faster pace than government expenditure in the province. Even as the economy has grown, successive governments have squeezed supports for public services and the people who rely on them.

Corporate profits have done exceptionally well in the last decade and are expected to continue to do well.

A large portion of Ontario's deficits over these past years are self-inflicted. An economically sound and healthy province such as Ontario has enough money to pay for the public services and safety net required. As the FAO remarked right before the pandemic, "deficits [that] come at a time of steady economic growth...are largely the result of policy decisions by both the current and previous governments."¹³ Tax cuts to business and the wealthy have left us worse off in times of need.

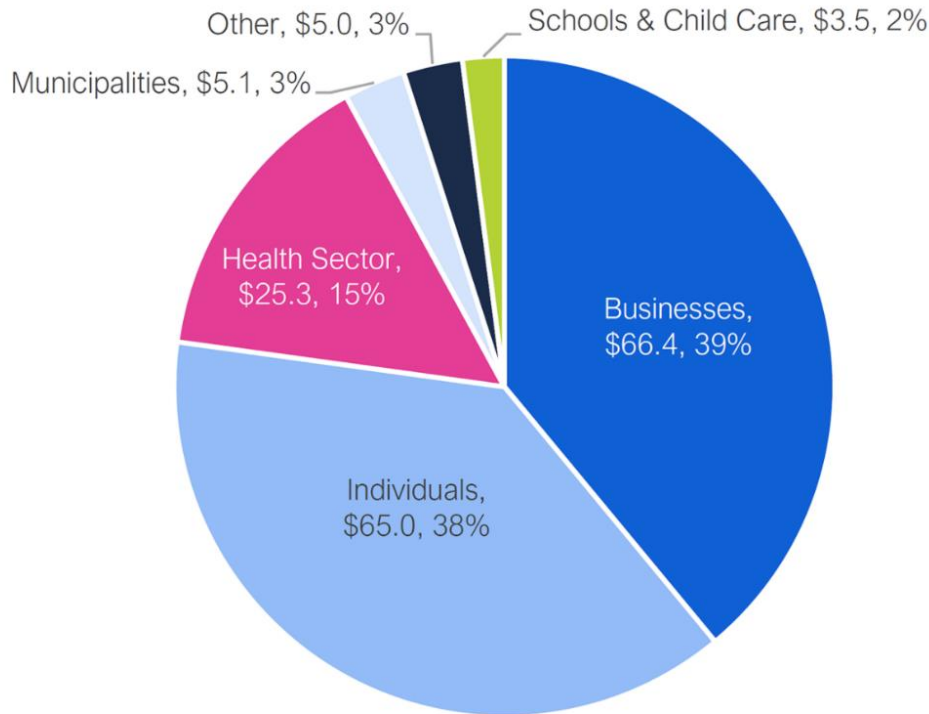
Substantial funds were needed to prop up Ontarians during the pandemic, however, a sizeable portion of the direct funds has ultimately come from the federal government. According to the FAO's most recent estimate, "the federal government's share of direct support measures is 85 per cent (\$144.7 billion) and the provincial government's share is 15 per cent (\$25.6 billion)".¹⁴

Of these direct support measures, it is alarming to note that more funds went to supporting business than to the people of Ontario.

¹³ <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/media/MS-fall-ebo-2019>

¹⁴ <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/fed-prov-response-2021>

Chart 1: Cost of federal and provincial COVID-19 direct support measures in Ontario by target of support, \$ billions and per cent



Source: FAO analysis of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, the Parliamentary Budget Office's Costing of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, and information provided by the Ministries of Health, Long-Term Care and Education, and Treasury Board Secretariat.

Recommendations:

- Lead the country in program spending and revenue generation per capita.

Taxation

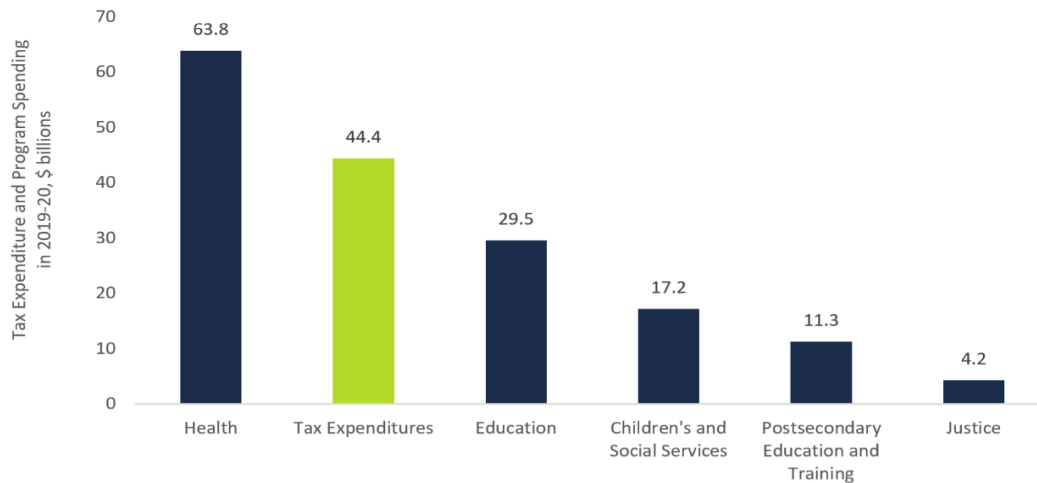
While the COVID-related impact to Ontario's balance sheet was necessary considering the unprecedented times, the government's inadequate attention to the revenue side of the balance sheet was troubling long before the pandemic. Successive governments have harmed Ontario's capacity to provide the necessary public services that are needed in our province. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives have deeply cut tax revenues and provided boutique tax credits to a variety of constituencies.

The FAO recently reviewed all government tax cuts and expenditures. Alarming, these 149 expenditures cost provincial coffers \$44.4 billion. According to the FAO, "if tax expenditures were identified separately in the Ontario Budget and compared to the province's program spending, tax expenditures would be the second highest spending sector for the province, after the health sector."¹⁵

¹⁵ https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/tax_expenditures_2020

While the loss of these tax expenditures took place over successive governments, the current government has, itself, given away substantial revenue since coming into office in 2018. According to the CCPA Ontario, the government has provided over \$5 billion in annual tax cuts and credits to various groups.¹⁶ Instead of investing in much needed public services, the government has manufactured a budgeting crisis to lay the groundwork for privatization.

Figure 2-1: Tax expenditures compared to program spending, 2019-20, \$ billions



Note: Program spending sectors exclude applicable tax expenditures.

Source: FAO analysis using the Taxation Transparency Report, 2019, the 2019 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review and the 2019-20 Expenditure Estimates.

Fair taxation is a key lever in compressing growing inequality and the precarious situation of a majority of people. The latest Ipsos Consumer Debt Index finds that “over half (53%) of Canadians are within \$200 of not being able to cover their bills and debt payments...which is a five-year high.”¹⁷

Meanwhile, there are the top 1% of Canadians who own 25% of the wealth.¹⁸ For this group, the pandemic was exceptionally fruitful. According to Oxfam, “15 new billionaires have been minted and the fortunes of the country’s 59 billionaires have increased by \$111 billion since March 2020, roughly the same amount the Canadian government spent on COVID-19 income support to workers, including CERB and CRB (\$109 billion).”¹⁹

Businesses and the wealthiest amongst us must pay their fair share. Many revenue options are available to secure Ontario’s financial footing as the below recommendations highlight.

¹⁶ <https://monitormag.ca/articles/budget-outlook-5-billion-in-annual-tax-cuts-weaken-ontarios-case-for-federal-dollars>

¹⁷ <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2021/04/08/2206577/0/en/Over-Half-53-of-Canadians-Within-200-of-Not-Being-Able-to-Cover-Their-Bills-and-Debt-Payments-Up-10-Points-Since-December-Reaching-a-Five-Year-High.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news/RP-2021-007-S--estimating-top-tail-family-wealth-distribution-in-canada--estimation-queue-superieure-distribution-patrimoine-familial-au-canada>

¹⁹ <https://www.oxfam.ca/news/10-richest-men-double-their-fortunes-in-pandemic-while-incomes-of-99-per-cent-of-humanity-fall/>

Recommendations:

Measure	Estimated Annual Revenue (billions)
Increase general CIT rate to 16%	5
Increase marginal PIT rate on the wealthiest one percent to 32.16%	3.8
Restore Ontario's corporate capital tax for medium and large sized corporations to 0.3% for general corporations and to 0.9% for financial corporations	2.1
Apply a uniform Business Education Tax rate with indexation	0.36
Remove the Employer Health Tax exemption for the first \$450,000 of payroll	0.9
Digital Services Tax (e.g., Netflix, Amazon, Facebook, and Google)	0.05
Introduce a financial activities tax (5% rate on finance sector profits and compensation)	2
Eliminate tax preference for stock options	0.16
Eliminate lower rate on tax on capital gains for individuals and corporations	1.5
Eliminate deductions for meals and entertainment expenses for corporations	0.12
Tax audit and compliance measures	2
Housing speculation tax (annual tax of \$20 per \$1,000 of assessed value)	0.67
Demand a fair share of the federal government's promise to increase transfer payments to lower levels of government	2
TOTAL	~21 \$Billion

Sources 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review; Ontario Transparency in Taxation; Ontario Budget Documents; Drummond Commission Report; Canada Revenue Agency, Income Statistics; Toby Sanger; Sheila Block, No Crisis on the Horizon: Ontario Debt 1990 – 2015, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, January 2016.; Financial Accountability Office Economic and Budget Outlook, Fall 2018

Labour

The pandemic has also brought a focus on the rights, safety, and wages of the working class. Our system of eroded employment standards and labour laws has badly failed workers. The labour movement and workers' rights advocates have long called to strengthen these laws, yet the half-measures introduced by the previous government were quickly reversed by the current government. The erosion of these labour rights left workers worse off during the pandemic.

In particular, low wage workers, who are disproportionately racialized, faced the brunt of the pandemic. We praised these workers as heroes, yet did not provide them appropriate personal protective equipment, permanent sick days, or an ability to advocate for themselves.

The pandemic highlighted how essential these workers are to our province, yet how little they are valued.

Unionized workers fared modestly better during the pandemic. Often, they have been able to secure enhanced health and safety measures, paid sick time, and premium pay. The benefits of a union are clear but too many essential workers, particularly in the private sector, are unable to access the protection of a union.

A complete overhaul of employment and labour law is necessary to ensure that all workers can join a union and to stop the labour standards race to the bottom.

In addition to strengthening labour and employment standards, the government must withdraw its illegal wage suppression legislation via Bill 124, *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act*, 2019.

Bill 124 imposes a series of 3-year “moderation periods” via salary and compensation caps on broader public sector workers. Total compensation increases are limited to 1% per year.

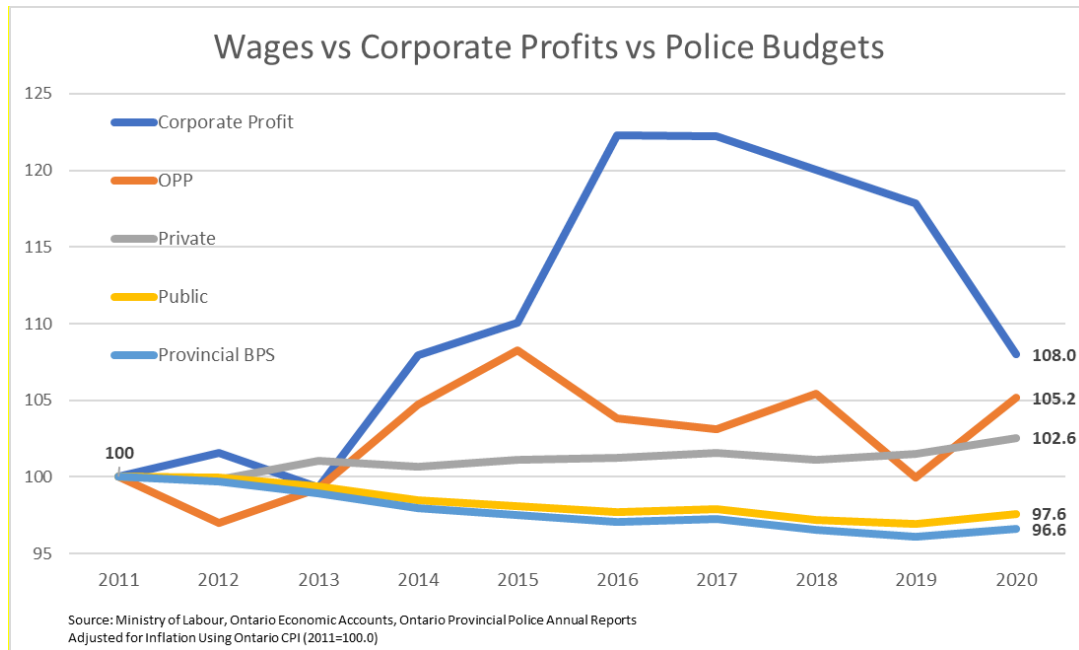
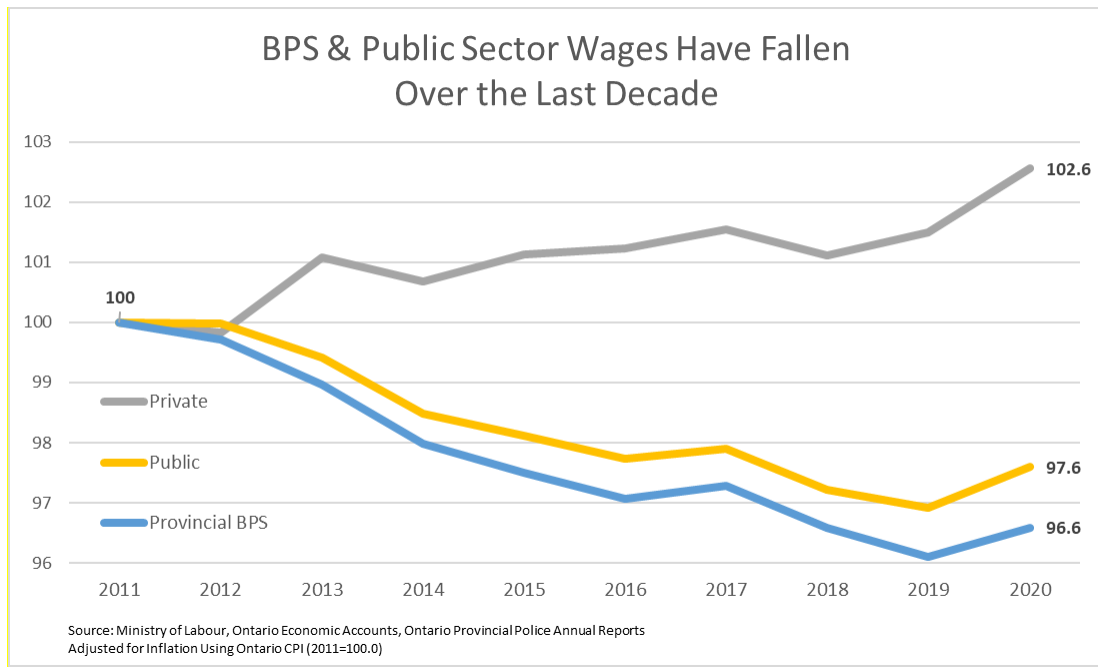
The breadth of this Charter-violation legislation is profound. According to the FAO there are 1,306,741 workers who could fall under the scope of wage legislation in the broader public sector.²⁰ That would amount to one in six working people having their wages illegally capped by the government instead being allowed to exercise their rights to free collective bargaining.

For these workers, the last twelve months of inflation have substantially decreased their wages. According to Statistics Canada, inflation was 5.2% annually over the last year.²¹ If all broader public sector workers fell under the compensation limit during the last year, it would amount to wage theft of at least \$2,896,194,000 from the pockets of these workers. The average worker would lose \$2,304.12 annually, which is more than two weeks of wages.

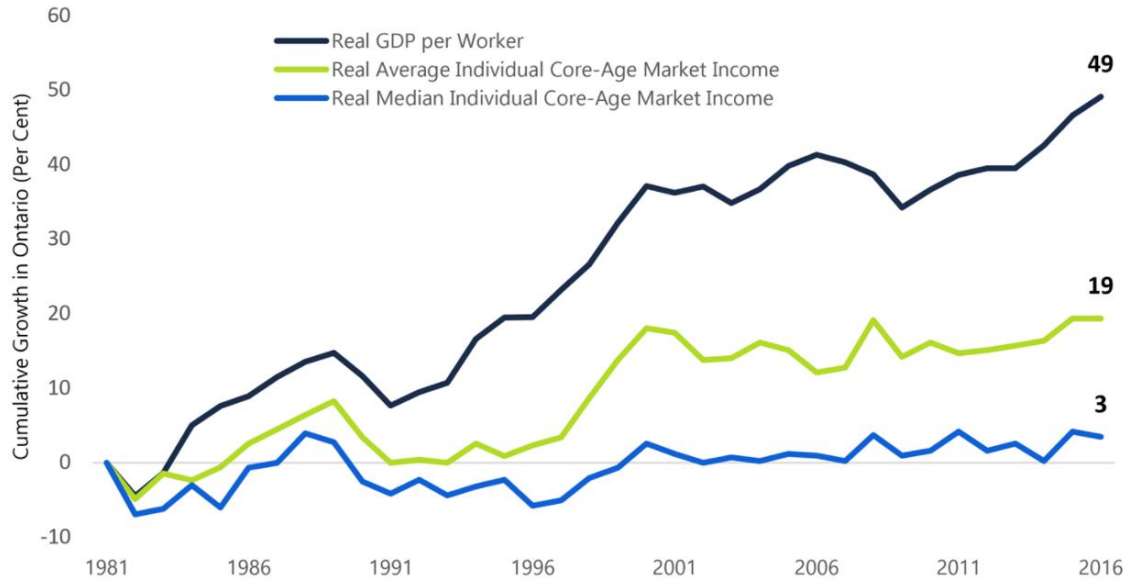
With high inflation expected to continue, this wage theft will also continue.

²⁰ <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/Gov-Employment-and-Wage-Expense>

²¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220119/dq220119a-eng.htm>



Economic growth did not raise the median income of working-age Ontarians



Recommendations:

- Repeal Bill 124, “Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act”, 2019.
- Broaden card check certification to all sectors.
- Provide successor rights for all sectors.
- Allow for automatic access to first contract arbitration, including remedial certification.
- Provide early disclosure to workplace list when a union shows that it has the support of a majority of its membership.
- Eliminate the six-month restriction on the right of employees to return to work following a lawful strike or lockout.
- Prohibit the use of back-to-work legislation during strikes and lockouts.
- Raise the minimum wage one dollar a year until it reaches \$20 in 2026 and then index increases to the Consumer Price Index annually.
- Provide 10, permanent, paid sick days for all workers and remove the requirement to provide a doctor's note.
- Reinstate equal pay for equal work legislation.
- Reintroduce scheduling provisions.
- Reintroduce the burden of proof for the employer to prove a worker is not an employee.
- Restore WSIB premiums rates.

Environment

The pandemic has taught us that we are both interconnected with one another and so are the challenges we face. Fighting the climate crisis requires us to address white supremacy, unaffordability, and other social and economic inequities at the same time. Moving towards a low-carbon society will require us to center Ontario's most vulnerable people impacted by the negative impacts of climate change both in our local communities and across the world.

The urgency of action required highlights the policy failures of the government. From the dismantling of the cap-and-trade program, to abandoning the public's legal right to environmental consultation²², to simply not basing its plans in sound evidence,²³ this government is actively working against the environment.

As severe weather events become more common, Ontario has already experienced costly ramifications for failing to act to address the underlying causes of climate change or investing to prepare for its impacts on chronically underfunded essential public infrastructure. Successive governments have also failed to harness the strength of our public services, failing to imagine, as an example, how the province could build a public, green energy system from generation to distribution.

Recommendations:

- Provide a Just Transition for workers impacted by climate change. This should include employing the social safety net for retraining.
- The government must lead the effort in finding workers -- impacted by climate change -- good jobs and not leave it up to the free market.
- In addition to government help, workers need one-to-one support from a Union to fully transition as unions have expertise in dealing with layoff and retraining.
- Establish and implement a credible plan to fight climate change and to meet our national and international obligations.
- Hold corporations accountable for their pollution.
- Create systems of regulation that provide Ontarians with a sustainable environment.
- Preserve farmland; Protect the Greenbelt.

Health Care

We endorse the submission made by Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) in its entirety. Below we highlight their key recommendations.

Recommendations:

- Increase staffing levels to reduce workloads and work to create a working environment where time off is possible and where work is safer.
- Repeal Bill 124 and allow wages to increase in real terms and strongly encourage the creation of full-time employment with benefits and pensions, as Quebec has done.
- Immediately and aggressively require the provision of proper protection against airborne transmission of COVID-19, including N95 respirators for all hospital and LTC workers.
- Take decisive steps to reduce violence in the hospital sector by investing significantly in safety measures. Encourage amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code to enhance protections for health care workers. Encourage the prosecution of offenders.

²² https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en21/ENV_Reporting_en21.pdf

²³ https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/news/19_newsreleases/2019news_v2_3.00.pdf

- Stop hospitals from using private agencies, which compete with them for employees.

Long-Term Care

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

The Ontario government's announcement in October 2020 to extend pandemic pay only for PSW's has created huge inequities in LTC facilities and reduced an already cratering morale. Instead of wages for crucial LTC workers rising together, the government seemingly chose only some workers to receive much needed wage recognition, regardless of the reality that all workers in our Long-Term Care homes are necessary to their safe operations. All LTC staff work together to care for Ontario's elderly. All put their health on the line, all are at risk of contracting COVID-19. There should be no differentiation made between PSW's and other LTC staff with respect to pandemic pay.

The greatest impediment to improving the care standard in Long-Term Care facilities in the long term is the ongoing shortage of front-line workers. In the summer of 2020, the government of Quebec recruited 10,000 residents to become PSW's. Those chosen had their tuition and expenses paid for by the government. Additionally, they were paid an hourly wage while in school and guaranteed work in a facility with a minimum base income on graduation. Sixty-five thousand Quebec residents applied for the program and it no doubt has helped with the staffing shortages in that province. Comparatively in Ontario, more needs to be done before we are already facing issues in recruitment and retention.

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

In November 2020, Ontario's government announced its intention to move to a legislated standard of four hours of hands-on nursing care per resident per day. This budget should immediately provide the additional funding to any long-term care facility that can hire to meet the standard. Further, there must be an accompanying procedure to verify that these desperately needed additional resources are being used to improve staffing – and it needs to be tracked facility-by-facility across the province. This is particularly important for commercial operators in the sector who have a track record of taking public money meant to improve care and using it to augment profits.

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

Recommendations:

- Provide pandemic pay to all LTC staff, not just PSW's.
- Recruit and train at least 20,000 PSW's through our Public College System.
- Raise the wages for all LTC employees in line with median hourly rates in public hospitals.
- Immediately start funding LTC Facilities based the 4-hour hands on care rule.
- Announce a moratorium on granting any new Long-Term Care bed licenses to for-profit operators.

Paramedics

Paramedics are under tremendous pressure due to underfunding of our health care system. The lack of capacity in our health care system has been a systemic problem long before COVID added to the current crisis off load delays, shortages of ambulances and paramedics, and worst of all, -- no ambulances.

A recent survey completed by our paramedics showed a staggering number of code blacks are occurring across the province – 41% reported them daily; another 24% reported them on a weekly basis. These are unacceptable risks to the public and the toll on CUPE Ontario members' physical and emotional well-being is unimaginable. The same survey showed that 84% had physical and mental impacts due to stress on the job, and 66% have experienced anxiety and/or panic attacks.

Recommendations:

- Funding necessary to correct the long-standing systemic problems.
- Dedicated resources for standardized mental health benefits for EMS members across the province like other first responders.

School Board

Real per-pupil funding for education has been declining for a decade, which has resulted in massive problems of understaffing and unmet student needs. Had Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding kept up with increases in enrolment and inflation from 2011-12 (the highpoint of per-pupil funding) to 2021-22, there would be approximately \$1.2 billion more in funding for our schools. That money would go a long way to meeting student needs.

Understaffing of education workers has put considerable strain on schools and has deprived students of the supports and services they need. We recommend increasing funding to school boards with the explicit purpose of hiring more Educational Assistants, custodians, school secretaries, library workers, Designated Early Childhood Educators, and maintenance and tradespersons. The full details of our recommendations for increased staffing are included in the CUPE/OSBCU submission to the Ministry of Education's annual consultation on education funding.

As this government budgets for the upcoming school year, which is also a bargaining year for all education worker unions, it will be necessary to also budget for substantial wage improvements. Education workers' wages have fallen far below inflation for the past decade. In no small part this is because of legislative incursions on the right to free collective bargaining (Bill 115 and Bill 124). Low wages have created recruitment and retention problems at school boards. But wage increases that have

fallen more than 10% below inflation over the past 10 years have also put a huge strain on the lowest paid workers in the school system. This must change.

Recommendations:

- Substantial wage increases for all education workers.
- Extend all funding for jobs that were negotiated in the 2019-22 Collective Agreements (Investments in System Priorities, Education Worker Protection Fund, Community Use of Schools).
- Increase real per-pupil funding to 2011-12 levels.
- Tie funding to specific staffing levels by limiting employers' ability to use funds for purposes for which they were not generated.
- Increase all benchmarks to fully reflect the costs of negotiated central Agreements and the real inflation of non-compensation related costs.
- Establish a provincial cleaning standard for schools, including the initial step of hiring an average of one additional permanent custodian per school.
- Improve special education outcomes by hiring an average of one additional EA per school, with the goal of reducing student to EA ratios and targeting resources to students with the greatest needs.
- Improve school administration by hiring an average of 0.5 FTE secretaries per school, to address increased workloads due to additional duties being added to secretaries.
- Double the number of library technicians employed in schools to enhance library services to students, improving their skills and outcomes.
- Training for custodial staff to do preventative maintenance, including additional hours of work to do preventative maintenance.
- Fund the hiring of additional maintenance workers to address the existing \$16 billion in deferred maintenance needs. The province will also need to develop a plan for eliminating deferred maintenance needs to protect infrastructure and provide the highest possible quality spaces for students to learn.
- Additional funding for student supervision. This will help enhance student safety and reduce workloads of other staff who can use this time to focus on the core duties of their occupations, focusing on student needs.
- Additional funding to ensure all DECEs have a minimum of 35 hours per week for full-time jobs.
- Ensure that there is one ECE in each Kindergarten class, including classes with fewer than 16 students.
- Enhance funding for Community Use of Schools.
- Increase IT Capacity at all School Boards, including additional IT staff.

Social Services

The pandemic has shown how vital social services are to our province, both during and outside the pandemic, and has exposed the many holes in our social safety net. During a time of intense job loss,

uncertainty about the future, and long periods of separation from loved ones, social services were, and continue to be, put to the test. Historically, social services have been undervalued by decision makers. Services continue to be underfunded, face a multitude of staffing shortages due to low and stagnant wages, and many non-profit agencies are struggling to get by despite the crucial services they provide to their respective communities.

Recommendations:

Child Care

- Ensure the federation wide bilateral child care agreement is signed and include an average of \$10-a-day child care, decent work, and a moratorium on the expansion of for-profit care.
- Execute the agreement and subsequent plan to expand non-profit and public care.
- Raise the working standards for the sector, including compensation, through a permanent wage enhancement, decent work standards, and a renewed commitment to staff recruitment and retention.

Municipal Social Services and Income Support

- Stop the privatization of employment services.
- Raise the rates of social assistance on an annual basis to reflect changes to the costs-of-living.
- Continue working with key actors in the sector on program reform co-design.

Developmental Services

- Make the 'pandemic premium' of \$3-per-hour permanent and ensure that the premium is applied universally to all workers in the sector.
- Develop a staff recruitment and retention strategy that includes education incentives through partnership with post-secondary institutions and access to decent work with full-time employment opportunities.

Children's Aid Societies

- Work with employers to implement universal workload standards.
- Invest more dollars into the sector for items such as mental health supports, particularly following dangerous or involved cases and, funding for anti-black and anti-indigenous racism training and/or programs.
- Stable, long-term, and adequate resources for front line staff to meet the demand for service. This funding should be based on reasonable caseloads, as well as providing dedicated funding for employers to meet collectively bargained employer obligations, such as annual wage increases, adequate benefit and pension coverage, and other improvements including workload protection.
- Recognition of the unique supports that are needed to maintain and evolve a stable community-based model, one that is responsive and flexible, continuously prepared to meet local needs, and encourages stable, long-term partnerships with families and providers.
- Fully funded preventative, aftercare, and residential services.
- Prioritize direct delivery of services over administrative demands, i.e., information management (CPIN), performance indicators, planning for shared services and any other future Ministry of

Children and Youth Services (MCYS) directives. Modernization costs should not come from core funding, and there should be a process to assess the impact of any initiatives before being rolled out (i.e., CPIN), as each agency will require different levels of resources.

- Recognize and prioritize the need for unique services to indigenous and racialized children and youth.
- Include a mechanism to increase funding for unexpected service and administrative demands.

Community Agencies

- Commit to a housing plan that will see a spectrum of rent geared to income housing (RGI) with new builds or conversions occurring in year one of governing.
- Work to bring more sustainable and predictable funding to the sector.

Post Secondary

Recommendations:

- Fund the previously announced 10% tuition fee reduction.
- Replace funding lost through crisis-caused enrolment decreases.
- Provide international students access to OHIP.
- Cancel the flawed performance-based funding.
- Reverse OSAP changes that transitioned grants to loans.

Equity

Recommendations:

- As September 30 is now recognized as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, we are asking the Provincial Government to also recognize and honour this day by making September 30 a provincial statutory holiday in Ontario so residents of this province can properly honour the lost children and survivors of residential schools.
- Collaborate and work closely with the Indigenous Communities and Elders to co-create, update, and develop appropriate Indigenous Curriculum in schools that reflects the historical truth and lived experiences of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people that experienced the genocidal Residential School system.
- Make a priority training on anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity and inclusivity for all government-funded agencies and institutions with clear processes to assess impact. This can be part of a larger move to reintroduce and reinforce employment equity mechanisms across the province.
- Increase funding to women's shelters and rape crisis centers to restore previously cut funding and to accommodate increased demands on these critical services.
- We echo the following recommendations from the Yellowhead Institute in relation to the climate emergency:
 - Include Indigenous communities and nations as full partners at policy decision-making tables.
 - Raise up the leadership from Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks.

- Respect Indigenous rights to self-determination and FPIC in the process of developing policy and in the contents of the policies and plans, as well.
- Adhere to federal commitments to Nation-to-Nation, Inuit-Crown, government-to-government relationships.
- Uphold the Calls to Actions emanating from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and other government-led inquiries, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.
- Promote climate solutions that consider the realities faced by Indigenous communities and nations, both rural and urban.
- Acknowledge and actively address structural inequalities that are continually being reproduced through colonial relationships, processes, and structures in so-called Canada.
- Address the root causes of climate change (e.g., colonial capitalism and extraction).
- Engage in an intersectional understanding of climate to design intersectional climate solutions that simultaneously reduce emissions and tackle systemic oppressions.

Health and Safety

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation and government policies/programs must recognize that hazard-based safety rather than risk-based (also called behaviour-based) safety is more effective at reducing work-related injuries and illness. Hazard-based safety programs focus on eliminating or appropriately controlling hazards in the workplace using the hierarchy of controls. Risk-based safety programs assume there is an agreeable level of workplace risk and that an individual worker's practices and behaviours will influence their susceptibility to injury or illness. When a hazard is not eliminated or controlled, it is only a matter of time before the worker is exposed to the hazard. In the end, the worker is blamed for "not acting safe."

Risk-based safety runs counter to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), as it assumes workers have a degree of control over the workplace policies, practices, and training. Instead, the OHSA sets out general duties of employers to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstance and to provide workers information and instruction to protect their health and safety. Workers, in turn, are required to work in a safe manner, use the equipment, protective devices and training they are provided, and report to the employer any hazardous conditions. These elements reinforce the fundamental OHS rights of workers; the right to know, the right to participate and the right to refuse unsafe work.

The pandemic has shown what happens when the government and public health agencies apply a risk-based or "wait and see" approach to workplace safety. As described by Justice Campbell in his report Spring of Fear (SARS Commission), the precautionary principle means not waiting for scientific certainty about a new infectious disease before taking reasonable precautions to reduce risk of exposure. In other words, prevention shouldn't wait. Had the government adopted a higher level of infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices (e.g., airborne precautions) at the beginning of the pandemic, thousands of public sector service workers would not have been exposed at work. Many died, while others are suffering from "long COVID".

Psychosocial Hazards – The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed stress points in how we deal with mental health in the workplace. The current model is an individual approach focusing on a worker's

psychological resilience rather than the psychosocial factors in the workplace environment that cause mental harm. This is the wrong approach.

The psychological approach presumes that the workplace does not impact mental health and that any mental health issues a worker experiences are personal in nature. A psychosocial approach to mental health in the workplace focuses on how the workplace impacts workers' mental health. Taking a psychosocial approach involves identifying and eliminating mental health hazards that can negatively impact workers. Given that mental health hazards can affect workers differently and there is no standard for resiliency, a psychosocial approach means creating a healthy workplace rather than "tougher" workers.

Addressing psychosocial hazards before they cause harm will help build the overall resiliency of the workforce. Further, if mental health injuries occur, they must be recognized the same as physical injuries. Programs and resources like Mental Health First Aid and the Mental Injury Toolkit, as well as adopting National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace are vital initiatives in protecting workers' mental health and reducing disability costs on employers.

Recommendations:

- Adopt a hazard-based safety and enshrine the hierarchy of controls in OHS legislation to promote stronger workplace safety and reduce further burden on the province's compensation scheme.
- Implement the precautionary principle in relation to workplace safety.
- Use a psychosocial approach, rather than a psychosocial psychological approach, to mental health withing in the workplace.