



## A FAIR SOCIETY

May 2, 2013

Ontario's economic performance and social fabric become even stronger when everyone has the opportunity to succeed. A fair society means everyone has access to high-quality public services that support their well-being and capacity to contribute to the economy. In a fair society, everyone has the opportunity to participate in and benefit from Ontario's prosperity.

A fair society also ensures intergenerational fairness. The government is committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18 and then reducing the net debt-to-GDP ratio to the pre-recession level of 27 per cent. This will help keep interest on debt at a manageable level and protect future generations from rising interest costs, which could otherwise crowd out spending on government priorities.

The government is taking action to strengthen Ontario as a fair society and increase opportunities for everyone. The 2013 Budget proposes to:

- Invest in more home and community care services
- Support early learning and targeted approaches to closing achievement gaps
- Transform social assistance to help more people find jobs
- Improve opportunities for Ontario's youth, people with disabilities and Aboriginal people
- Protect the most vulnerable and build strong, safe communities
- Increase opportunities for people to save for retirement.

### ***Access to High-Quality Public Services***

#### **Providing the Right Care, at the Right Time, in the Right Place**

The government's goal is to make Ontario the healthiest place in North America to grow up and grow old by making sure families get the best health care where and when they need it. Providing the right care, at the right time, in the right place is a key pillar of Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care. As part of this plan, the government would:

- Increase investment in home and community care by an additional one per cent annually over the four per cent increase announced in the 2012 Budget. This would result in a total increase of more than \$700 million by 2015-16 above 2012-13 investments, including \$260 million in 2013-14.
- Focus new investments on providing care in the community to increase options available to seniors to help them stay at home longer, where they want to be. These investments will result in more home care for seniors, as well as provide relief for caregivers and support those facing mental health and addictions challenges.

- Invest to reduce home care wait times for nursing services and improve personal support services for clients with complex care needs, with a target of providing service within five days following a Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) assessment.
- Invest in community Health Links that will promote collaboration in patient care, where different providers caring for the same person will have one unified plan of care for that person.

### **Improving Health Care for All**

The government is committed to ensuring all the people in this province have access to the same high-quality health care services. To achieve this goal, the government is focused on implementing measures that help meet the unique health care needs of patients across Ontario, including:

- Investing \$20 million annually to help small and rural hospitals improve patient care and transform their organizations.
- Launching Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors to provide better access to health care, quality resources, and improved safety and security for Ontario's seniors. The Plan draws on new and existing government programs to ensure seniors and their caregivers have access to the services they need, when and where they need them.
- Moving forward with the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, focused to date on children and youth, with funding growing to \$93 million per year by 2013-14.
- Continuing to support mental health and addiction services across the province, including early intervention, community-based counselling, employment training, supportive housing, residential treatment, and prevention of and treatment for substance abuse and problem gambling.
- Working with First Nation communities to increase access to care and community supports for those addicted to prescription narcotics. The government is investing in five new Community Wellness Development Teams with mental health and addictions expertise, blending traditional and cultural practices, and supporting the use of telemedicine to help patients in remote communities.

### **Early Learning and Student Achievement**

The government continues to build on its vision for an integrated early years program and services that meet the needs of Ontario's children and parents, including investing an additional \$39 million in 2015-16 to support the child care system. The support builds on previously announced funding for child care: in the 2012 Budget, the government announced additional funding of \$90 million in 2012-13, \$68 million in 2013-14 and \$84 million in 2014-15 to support child care operators, parents and children to seamlessly transition into full-day kindergarten.

The government is also working to close the achievement gap among struggling students. An investment of \$12.6 million over three years, starting in 2013-14, would support the expansion of summer learning programs that help struggling students in lower-income communities improve their reading, writing and math skills over the summer months.

## ***Increasing Opportunities***

### **Helping Social Assistance Recipients into Employment**

Removing barriers and increasing opportunities for everyone to participate in the workforce are good for the economy. This includes people with disabilities who may have the capacity and desire for work, but are lacking the supports they need for success.

In the 2013 Budget, the government announces the following measures to help social assistance recipients transition to work:

- Enabling Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients to keep the first \$200 of employment earnings each month before their social assistance benefits are reduced, which will make it easier for those people who face multiple barriers to gain an initial foothold in the labour force.
- Working with partners to develop a simpler, more effective and flexible employment-related benefit structure to help social assistance recipients find jobs.
- Removing barriers for Ontario Works recipients who want to pursue self-employment by treating such income the same as employment earnings. With this change, self-employment income will be treated the same in both the Ontario Works and ODSP programs.
- Harmonizing rules so that more high school students in families receiving social assistance are able to keep their earnings from part-time jobs.
- Engaging municipalities, First Nation communities and employment service providers on better ways to link social assistance recipients with services provided by Employment Ontario.

In addition, the government will engage with the private sector and other partners to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities and other social assistance recipients facing multiple barriers to employment. Measures will include:

- Moving the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, which will help improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Working with corporate leaders to establish a Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities to champion the hiring of people with disabilities.
- Engaging with employers and service delivery partners in a series of roundtables to improve social assistance employment services and supports for those who are able to work, and to better connect clients, including people with disabilities, to the workforce.

### **Improving Financial Security**

The government would make it easier for social assistance recipients to transition to work by improving their financial security, which helps them deal with adversity and promotes greater independence and stability.

As an initial step, the government is increasing benefit rates for social assistance recipients:

- Ontario Works recipients and persons with disabilities receiving ODSP will get a one per cent increase in their benefits.
- Single Ontario Works adults without children will also receive an additional top-up of \$14 per month. The top-up and the one per cent increase mean an additional \$20 per month, or an increase of more than three per cent.
- Benefit rate increases will take effect in September 2013 for ODSP and in October 2013 for Ontario Works.

The government is also simplifying and harmonizing some of the social assistance system's complex rules. The following changes will take effect September 2013:

- To help people become more financially secure, limits for liquid assets, including cash, will be increased to \$2,500 from \$606 for single adults receiving Ontario Works and to \$5,000 from \$1,043 for couples.
- The government will remove the restriction on the value of a primary vehicle for Ontario Works recipients so that they can keep a vehicle they may need for work.
- First Nation and northern communities administering Ontario Works will be given greater flexibility to decide which assets recipients should be allowed to keep without affecting their eligibility for social assistance, in order to reflect the unique circumstances of First Nation and northern communities.
- Ontario Works recipients will be allowed to receive gifts of up to \$6,000 per year. This change will help improve the financial stability of Ontario Works recipients and will align Ontario Works and ODSP rules on allowable gifts.

In addition, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and Health and Long-Term Care will work together to introduce a simplified process for accessing and administering medical travel supports for social assistance recipients living in northern Ontario.

These measures support an investment of more than \$400 million over three years to increase opportunities for social assistance recipients.

### **Supporting Families**

The government believes the most effective way to reduce poverty and improve financial security is through employment. As a result, the government will continue to provide programs that help support people while they work:

- As announced in the 2012 Budget, the government is proposing to increase the maximum annual Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) to \$1,210 per eligible child in July 2013 and to \$1,310 in July 2014. Together, these increases will extend OCB benefits to an additional 90,000 children.
- The government would establish an advisory panel of business, worker and youth representatives to provide advice on how to adjust Ontario's minimum wages, with a report back to government within six months from the date the Budget would pass.
- Ontario is protecting jobs for caregivers through the proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013, which, if passed, would build on the existing Family Medical Leave by creating three new unpaid job-protected leaves that would allow employees to care for sick or injured loved ones without fear of losing their jobs.
- Ontario is investing ongoing funding of \$3 million, beginning in 2013-14, to enhance enforcement of the *Employment Standards Act, 2000*, which would help protect vulnerable workers and ensure fairness in the workplace.

## **Supporting Opportunities for Aboriginal People**

Improved social conditions and economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities are essential to ensuring Aboriginal people can work and thrive. The government will work with Aboriginal people, both on- and off-reserve, to realize change by:

- Providing an additional \$5 million annually to improve student achievement for Aboriginal students, in addition to supporting implementation of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework.
- Engaging with First Nation communities and other Aboriginal groups in separate and substantive discussions on social assistance reform to ensure their needs are properly understood and addressed.
- Allowing First Nation and northern communities greater flexibility in administering Ontario Works asset rules, recognizing the unique challenges and circumstances of low-income people living in these communities.
- Introducing a new transitional fund to support the housing needs of First Nation communities and expanding eligibility to all low-income people in First Nation communities, not just those receiving social assistance.
- Working with First Nation, Métis and Inuit people to develop a multi-year Aboriginal Children and Youth Strategy to transform services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people by building community-driven, integrated and culturally appropriate supports.
- Providing annual funding of \$4 million to continue to support 40 front-line officer positions in First Nation police services across Ontario.

## **Support for Vulnerable Populations**

The government is taking action to support Ontario's most vulnerable so that they can more fully participate in their communities. Measures announced in the 2013 Budget include:

- Investing more than \$42 million annually in additional funding to help adults with developmental disabilities and their families in urgent need, reduce waitlist pressures and better support those with complex needs.
- Helping young adults with developmental disabilities currently receiving youth residential services move to more appropriate adult services and supports.
- Providing \$5 million annually for targeted investments in children's treatment centres, to support a pilot program to help children across the province transition into school and to expand the family-centred Children's Rehabilitation Information System to five children's treatment centres in northern Ontario.
- Promoting Registered Disability Savings Plans (RDSPs) and encouraging ODSP recipients and other people with disabilities to establish RDSPs. These savings plans can help parents save for children with disabilities, and help people with disabilities plan for their future needs.

## **Building Safer and Stronger Communities**

To help ensure Ontario communities and public spaces are safe and promote access to justice for low-income families and other vulnerable groups, the government would provide:

- \$30 million in additional funding over three years to Legal Aid Ontario to strengthen the capacity of Family Law Service Centres and other community and legal clinics across Ontario and ensure their services are sustainable. This amount is in addition to the \$150 million investment in Legal Aid Ontario over four years announced in September 2009.
- \$12.5 million in permanent annual funding for the Provincial Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy and the Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy to help address guns and gang violence and improve public safety.

## **Securing Retirement Incomes**

Ontario is committed to a strong and secure retirement income system to help ensure that today's workers maintain a comparable standard of living when they retire.

As part of this commitment, Ontario is working with other provinces and the federal government to agree on a plan to introduce a modest, fully funded enhancement to the Canada Pension Plan.

In addition, Ontario will explore innovative new retirement savings options, including:

- Consulting with interested parties to determine how pooled registered pension plans should be implemented as a retirement savings option in Ontario, before introducing legislation.
- Developing a framework for single-employer target benefit plans.

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