

Ontario Rate of Child Poverty Higher Now than in 1989 Targeted action needed with the next Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

TORONTO – Ontario children face higher rates of poverty now than they did 30 years ago, when the federal all-party resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000 was signed, a new report shows. Ontario Campaign 2000's report *Make Child and Family Poverty History: A Vision for Ontario's Next Poverty Reduction Strategy* finds that just under 1 in 5 (18.7%) children under 18, and 1 in 5 (20.2%) children under six are living in poverty in the province. Poverty rates for diverse children are higher still. The rate of families leaving poverty has also slowed considerably in recent years.

"Pandemic or not, it is unacceptable that thousands of children go to bed hungry at night, in precarious housing, facing discrimination and ill health, while their families struggle to make ends meet," says Claudia Calabro, Ontario Campaign 2000 Coordinator. "When one third of single parents in Ontario live in poverty, it is a clear sign that the government is not doing enough to support the most vulnerable among us."

The Ontario government first developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008 and was in the middle of engaging in consultations for its third iteration of the Strategy when the global COVID-19 pandemic began to intensify in Ontario.

"The current COVID-19 public health crisis is amplifying the cracks in Ontario's already weak social support systems," says Arash Ghiassi of the Income Security Advocacy Centre of Ontario. "Social assistance payments that fall well below the poverty line, and deepening inequality overall, means that families in low income, especially families on social assistance, will face a much harder time recovering from the crisis."

As the government of Ontario begins to turn its attention to COVID-19 provincial recovery planning, the most vulnerable in the province must not be left behind.

"Policies that address the gendered and racial dimensions of poverty are critical to ending gender-based violence, childhood poverty and other forms of inequality," says Heather McGregor, CEO of YWCA Toronto.

Ontario Campaign 2000 urges the government to commit to reducing child and family poverty by 25% by 2025. The focus of the PRS must be on much needed policy changes and targeted investments designed to eradicate child and family poverty, including addressing inequities faced by marginalized groups; supporting vulnerable workers through increased worker protections and minimum wage; public, high quality child care; and increasing the rates for social assistance and the Ontario Child Benefit.

Ontario Campaign 2000 also advises the province to re-open Poverty Reduction Strategy consultations in 6-12 months, in order to ensure that people living in low income are supported throughout and beyond the recovery process.

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Ontario Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan network of over 70 organizations working collaboratively to end child and family poverty. We are hosted by Family Service Toronto. The full report is available at <http://www.ontariocampaign2000.ca> (French version to follow)

CONTACT

Claudia Calabro, Ontario Coordinator, Campaign 2000: 416-595-9230 ex 241

ClaudiaCa@familyservicetoronto.org

BACKGROUND:

Key Findings from Ontario Campaign 2000's *Make Child and Family Poverty History: A Vision for the Next Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy*:

- Ontario is the only province or territory that has more children living in poverty in 2017 than in 1989; The under-18 poverty rate is 18.7% compared to 18.3% in 1989
- Just under 1 in 5 children under 18 live in poverty in Ontario (523,990 children)
- The under-6 child poverty rate has increased from 18.8% in 2015 to 20.2% in 2017 in Ontario
- 1 in 5 children under 6 live in poverty in Ontario (176,290 children)
- 1 in 7 families with children live in poverty in Ontario (346,080 families)
- More than one third of lone-parent families live in poverty
- Lone parent families are predominantly led by women
- Government transfers are important mechanisms to mitigate child poverty. Without transfers such as the OCB and CCB, the child poverty rate in Ontario would be 34.3% instead of 18.7%
- The gender wage gap contributes to child and family poverty. Between 2016 and 2017, the annual median family income gap between women and men increased by \$840.
- Average annual child care expenses top \$20,000 per child, only slightly lower than a parent would make working full time at minimum wage
- Between 2008 and 2018, the percentage of the population holding minimum wage jobs in Ontario doubled from 7% to 15%.
- 33% of food bank users in the province are children
- Social assistance rates in Ontario keep families in a state of destitution well below the Low Income Measure (as measured by CFLIM-AT) – nearly 60% below the 2017 CFLIM-AT Low income cut-off.