



# Ontario ACORN

## 2024 Budget Submission

ACORN Canada is a national community union of low- and moderate-income people with 31 elected chapters in 14 cities across the country. Ontario ACORN has members in several cities across the province. Members of ACORN are low- and moderate-income people who are bearing the brunt of record inflation and skyrocketing rent prices.

ACORN would like to take this opportunity to share our priorities for Ontario's 2024 Budget. We believe the budget is an extremely important tool to ensure that public funds are allocated and spent on issues that matter to people, not profit-making corporations.

### 1. Housing

ACORN members across the province are disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis. Not only are our members living in extremely unaffordable housing, those who are living in relatively affordable housing are losing their homes to corporate landlords that are using predatory tactics to evict long-term tenants to make more money. The lack of full rent control coupled with loopholes in the Residential Tenancies Act are making matters worse. There are a range of policy changes that ACORN would like to recommend which will go a long way in ensuring tenants' right to affordable and healthy homes in Ontario.

#### I. Full Rent Control

Research by the [CMHC](#) did not find any evidence that rental starts were lower in rent control markets than in no rent control markets. Further, the report also indicates that new unit exemptions lead to an increase in the number of uncontrolled units in the rental price index, which would cause the average rental price in the index to increase. Given this, ACORN strongly recommends the following:

- Apply rent control to **all buildings**.
- Implement **vacancy control** to ensure that rents aren't raised substantially between tenancies.
- **Ban Above the Guideline Rent Increases** or AGIs to close the loophole that allows for excessive rent hikes above annual increases.

#### ii. Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB) Reform

- Resume **LTB hearings in-person** and stop digital, phone and written hearings unless preferred by the tenant.
- Overhaul the LTB as it is has become an eviction factory. Meanwhile, tenants wait three times as long to have their cases against their landlords heard.
- Immediately triage outstanding tenant applications
- Rebalance the LTB by:
  1. Treating tenants' applications for disrepair and harassment as serious health and safety issues
  2. Eliminating the differences in hearing wait times between tenants and landlords

3. 90% of cases at the LTB are initiated by landlords meaning there is an urgent need to remove barriers for tenants
- Improve access to duty counsel and the quality of free legal information on tenants' rights and LTB procedures
  - Track and make publicly available data related to notices, filings and outcomes to better monitor housing loss through evictions, AGIs and disrepair

### **iii. Stop Slumlords**

- Retain and protect current affordable housing stock by incentivizing investment in repairs
- Give cities explicit power to properly regulate problematic landlords (similar to other businesses) through licensing, pro-active inspections, minimum standards, strict timelines for repairs and serious penalties
- Landlords found in serious breach of a tenants' right to safe, adequate housing by the LTB should face more severe penalties and consequences

### **iv. End Tenant Displacement**

- Stop renovations and demovictions by taking the following measures:
  1. Pass vacancy control to remove current financial incentive
  2. Ensure that if a tenant MUST vacate their unit for major repairs that they are provided temporary accommodations or a rental top up, and that tenants' right to return at the same right is strongly enforced
  3. Give cities the explicit power to pass renovation bylaws
- Stop predatory corporate landlords from using N12 eviction notices (landlords' own use) to renovict tenants by:
  1. Increasing notice and compensation requirements
  2. Banning the use of N12s by corporate landlords and in buildings over 3 stories
  3. Change the process for filing and proving a bad faith eviction case at the LTB as the burden currently rests primarily on the tenant
- Ban "cash for keys" or voluntary evictions and strongly enforce.

### **v. Repeal housing bills that have devastating consequences on tenants**

- Repeal Bill 184 that made evictions easier by limiting tenants' legal defences and in some cases allowing evictions to happen without a hearing
- Repeal Bill 23 that restricts cities' powers to build and protect affordable housing while also destroying farmland/wetlands
- Repeal Bill 97's decision to allow landlords to increase rents if they have air conditioning

### **vi. Increase Funding to Non-Market Housing**

- Invest in the development of non-market rental housing including social housing, non-profits, co-ops and land trusts to eliminate the province's waitlist for affordable housing
- Support the acquisition of existing affordable rental buildings to prevent them from falling into the hands of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)

### **vii Allow Inclusionary Zoning Policies to be created locally**

- Allow for more affordable housing to be built in new developments by giving cities the power to create their own IZ programs based on local conditions.
- Remove restrictions on IZ policies that:
  - Prevent it from being applied citywide.
  - Cap affordable housing at 5%.
  - Allow affordable housing to expire and return to market rates.
  - Define affordable housing based on market rents instead of income.
- Support Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) to stop the gentrification of housing along transit corridors where money is flowing from the province.
  - Including 30% affordable housing mandated in these zones for people in core housing need.

### **ix. Start a Rental Registry**

- Start a Rental Registry in Ontario that tracks the rents of individual units. Information on rents should be mandatory and publicly accessible to prevent rent gouging and enforce tenant protections.

### **x. Moratorium on Selling Government Owned Land**

- Stop selling government owned land to developers. Instead, hold it for deeply affordable, non-market rental housing

### **x. Climate Resiliency in Buildings**

- Fund retrofits with affordability and anti-eviction covenants. For example, ensure that the funding from the newly created Ontario Infrastructure Bank for retrofits does not lead to illegal rent increases and/or evictions by including affordability and anti-eviction covenants in the funding agreements.
- Introduce a program to provide free energy efficient AC/heat pumps to low income and vulnerable tenants
- Implement minimum energy efficiency standards

## **2. ODSP/OW**

Social assistance rates remain grossly low, pushing people with disabilities or in need of assistance in deep poverty. Even though some minor tweaks have been made to ODSP, the rates remain grossly inadequate and several other issues persist. OW rates have remained stagnant for many years while inflation during this time has risen 35.2%. The government needs to take urgent action to ensure that people have a life with dignity.

- Raise ODSP and OW by at least doubling the rates.
- Increase the housing allowance to match market rent (based on the city the recipient lives in).
- The implementation of the province's new vision for social assistance transformation needs to be stopped. The emphasis is on working with municipalities to develop Ontario's social assistance system into a modern, digitized system and getting more people in employment.

- However, the new “human-services” model is not based on humans but a completely digitized system with no acknowledgment of the fact that many people don’t have access to the internet or lack digital literacy skills.
- It wants to push a lot of responsibility to the cities. Importantly, this will also mean a modified model of funding.
- There is an overemphasis on moving people on ODSP to employment. Many people on ODSP have already been deemed unable to work and this new model is to kick more people off ODSP under the guise of employment and independence.
- Stop clawbacks on spousal income and spousal benefits.

### **3. End predatory lending**

Lack of access to fair credit and failure of the banks and governments is pushing low- and moderate-income people to rely on predatory lenders. Payday lenders are charging exorbitant interest rates which lead to a vicious cycle of debt. While Ontario lowered the fee per \$100 for payday loans to \$15, it still remains too high with an APR of 400%. Extremely short repayment time and no fair banking alternatives are extremely important issues that need attention.

- Lower the interest rate to \$10 on \$100.
- Extend repayment using a model similar to Alberta’s repayment extension of 42 - 60 days versus the usual 14 day payback.
- Enforce the ban on rollover loans by creating a user real-time database to monitor and avoid rollovers from company to company
- Ensure enforcement of criminal interest rate for payday and instalment loans by creating a robust complaint mechanism so that people can challenge the lenders who are ripping off people.
- Support the creation of alternative, low interest loan products.

### **4. Affordable childcare**

The partnership between the federal and provincial government to provide a \$10 a month childcare program is moving forward. However, for the program to be comprehensive, the province needs to step up.

- Work with the federal government to ensure a \$10 a month childcare program.
- Further, allocate additional funds to ensure the following:
  - Number of child care centres and spaces in low income/underserved communities has increased.
  - Programming for parents who perform shift work/overnight hours, etc is expanded.

### **5. 10 paid sick days**

The pandemic clearly demonstrated the need for permanent sick days for all workers. While some changes were made during the pandemic and helped the most vulnerable workers, those were temporary. Sick days for all workers are needed permanently.

- Implement 10 permanent paid sick days program accessible to all workers.