

Mr. Michael Parsa
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto ON M7A 1Z1

Dear Mr. Michael Parsa,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the 2022 Ontario Budget discussion.

Blue Door, founded in 1982, is the largest emergency housing provider in York Region. We provide life-saving support to the community's most vulnerable people.

To address the root causes of homelessness, Blue Door has developed a 3-year strategic plan (2020-2023) consisting of the following four priorities: 1) Housing and Homelessness Prevention; 2) Health; 3) Employment; 4) Organizational Capacity and Excellence.

These strategic priorities are captured in Blue Door's ongoing and new services, including:

1. Housing and Homelessness Prevention

- a. three emergency housing programs serving families, men, and male youth;
- b. Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold - A Program by Blue Door, a coalition of over 50 York Region interfaith communities providing youth and adults experiencing poverty and homelessness with safe seasonal emergency housing, warm hospitality, and wraparound supports from November to March;
- c. three second stage transitional housing programs for individuals who need longer-term support to overcome barriers and secure and retain housing, in particular families, senior men, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth;
- d. Housing to Health, a partnership between Blue Door, LOFT, and The Krasman Centre offering support in securing and retaining housing;
- e. housing retention programs, providing aftercare support people moving from Blue Door's emergency housing programs into a home of their own;
- f. counselling & case management to support individuals in achieving their goals and in accessing supports;

2. Employment

- a. Construct – A Social Enterprise by Blue Door, which provides rapid 8-week skills training, work experience, wraparound supports, and direct connections to employment to help vulnerable people secure well-paying, in-demand careers in construction trades;

3. Health

- a. In-Reach Worker, which connects individuals at risk of homelessness in Southlake Regional Health Centre to be discharged safely rather than into the streets.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE 2022 ONTARIO BUDGET: Increase OW and ODSP supports

Vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness arrive at our doors seeking immediate emergency housing in order to have a period of stabilization. During their stay at Blue Door, they receive assistance to secure much-needed financial income and other supports to then afford and maintain housing.

Sources of financial income accessed by people experiencing homelessness include Ontario Works (40%), disability benefits (30%), and employment (17%) (York Region's 2018 Homeless Count). In a year, an average of 163 youth will access Blue Door's emergency housing. In one year's sampling, 78 youth received income support from ODSP, employment insurance, CAS, OW, or had no income. Despite this reliance on social assistance programs like OW and ODSP, there has been a notable decrease in employment-related support through these programs in the Ontario budget.

The severity of poverty among this young and vulnerable population becomes clear when comparing income and basic living costs. Currently, a single individual receives \$720 from Ontario Works. However, the average cost of a bachelor apartment in the GTA is \$1,202/month (CMHC-2020 Rental Market Report).

Unable to afford independent bachelor apartments, youth settle on shared accommodations, renting a single room at an average of \$700/month. This leaves at most \$70 or as little as \$20 to meet their basic needs (e.g. food, clothing, PPE, transportation, toiletries, etc.) for the remainder of the month.

Families face similar circumstances. A couple without children receives approximately \$1,150 from OW. However, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in the GTA is \$1,417/month (CMHC-2020 Rental Market Report). Unable to afford market rent, families search or wait for affordable options, which could be a bachelor apartment (\$1,202/month). They may also try to "get lucky" by finding apartments with rates closer to \$1,000/month, all the while forced to make choices of rent vs. food vs. other basic needs.

While OW and ODSP may allow individuals and families to initially find housing, the reality is that many of our citizens continue to be severely impacted by poverty and remain at risk of becoming homeless again. By increasing support, we can provide a greater deal of housing stability and poverty reduction, helping the lives of many vulnerable Ontarians.

Sincerely,



Emmy Kelly
Chief Operating Officer

BLUE DOOR- *Giving Hope A Home*
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