

December 7, 2023

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Via email: Premier@ontario.ca

The Honourable Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Via email: MinisterMCCSS@ontario.ca

MPP Trevor Jones
Chatham-Kent-Leamington
Via email: trevor.jones@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford, Minister Parsa and MPP Jones:

RE: Ontario Works Rates

On November 6, 2023, after much discussion on increased homelessness in Chatham-Kent, Councillor Marjorie Crew made the following motion that was passed unanimously by the Mayor and Council of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent:

“That Council prepare a letter addressed to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, as well as local MPPs to strongly recommend that accommodation rates of social assistance payments increase to the Average Market Rent (for all types of rentals) for recipients of Ontario Works Assistance and the Ontario Disability Support Program. And that a copy of this letter be sent to AMO, ROMA, aIPHa and all Councils in Ontario”.

In Chatham-Kent:

- 1) Total homelessness has been gradually increasing since November 2022.
 - (a) Pre-pandemic, it was decreasing through Employment and Social Services' 'Housing First' approach, coordinated access system and a 'By Name List'.
- 2) The percentage of individuals experiencing homelessness in our community have identified as staying outdoors doubled in 2023 from 2022.
- 3) The average housing move-ins has been steadily declining each month.
- 4) On average, the number of new individuals (never previously identified as experiencing homelessness) added to the By Name List each month has increased from 2022.
- 5) The average market rent is \$1,522 for a one-bedroom apartment and a single person on Ontario Works receives a maximum of \$390 toward accommodation costs.

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Homelessness is increasing in Chatham-Kent and the well-being of our residents is decreasing. Since 2018, the Ontario Works rates have been frozen and yet the caseload in Chatham-Kent has only increased. If the goal was to drive more people into the workforce it is not working, but instead driving more people into homelessness. Nearly 80% of people accessing emergency shelter have social assistance as their main source of income. We cannot build affordable housing fast enough and need upstream issues like social assistance rates to be resolved to stop our community members from slipping into homelessness. Homelessness has resulted in significant pressures and costs on many of our services including Police, Fire Services, Paramedics, Public Works, Parks and Social Services. Unhoused residents are suffering, and property taxpayers are seeing significant asks from the 2024-2027 budgets to mitigate the challenges of homelessness.

In recent years, housing was determined to be a human right by both the Federal and Provincial governments and thus income maintenance programs should have housing allowances that reflect actual expenses. Other income programs have increased, yet Ontario Works particularly has remained far below the poverty line with no increase since 2017. In 1995, social assistance rates were slashed by 21.6% and have only increased by 41%. At the same time \$1.00 in 1995 has the same buying power as \$1.81 today, so inflation over that period has been over 80% - however, the Ontario Works rate has increased by only about 41% (half of inflation rate) for a single person in the past 28 years (5,6). People who have had to find new housing in today's rental market, experience a higher rate of inflation as they are required to pay rents that have increased by approximately 133% in that time period.

For these reasons and the fact that Ontario social assistance rates are one of the lowest of provinces in Canada, we ask that the Province of Ontario raise social assistance rates, especially Ontario Works Assistance significantly using the Average Market Rent to determine accommodation limits. This will provide social assistance recipients the opportunity to stay housed and be well, potentially re-joining the workforce and reduce the burden on community programs and municipal services. Our downtowns and parks can return to what we all enjoyed in smaller cities like ours only a few years ago. An investment in our citizens who are vulnerable is expected to create savings in almost every other sector.

Sincerely,



Darrin Canniff, Mayor/CEO
Municipality of Chatham-Kent

C: Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA)
alPHa
Ontario Councils