



The Step it Up! 'Platform' for Parties

An action plan for ending violence against women in Ontario

On October 6th Ontario will vote for a new provincial government. One by one, political parties are releasing their election platforms. Platforms promise to do what the party thinks is important to Ontario voters.

You may be surprised at what some of them say. You may be more surprised at what they don't say—especially about their 'platform' on ending violence against women and girls in Ontario.

The Step it Up! Campaign wants to change that. So the Campaign has released its own 'platform' of ways the next government of Ontario can act to make a real difference in the lives of women. We want to get *our* 'platform' into *their* platforms.

Violence against women must end!

Women in Ontario are assaulted, raped, emotionally destroyed and murdered by men who believe they are entitled to commit violence against women and girls. Over 500 women and children have been murdered by male partners alone in the past 20 years.

Aboriginal women continue to go missing and are often found murdered in Ontario. Women with disabilities remain more at risk of violence than other women. Poverty makes women more vulnerable to violence; violence makes women more vulnerable to poverty. Racism and discrimination continue to create huge barriers for women who try to escape.

What is your candidate saying?

What is your government doing about this? What will your candidates promise to do about it? When will they do it?

Ask them. Join with others in your community to get the answers. Tell political parties to "step it up!" Make your vote count to stop violence against women!

End Violence Against Women
Mettre fin à la violence faite aux femmes

What is the Step it Up! Campaign?

Step It Up! is a coalition of provincial women's networks, rape crisis centres, women's emergency shelters and second stage housing programs, women's centres, Labour, equity-seeking groups, community social services and individuals.

Our goal is to urge all political parties—especially during elections—to make commitments on action to stop violence against all women in the province.

Step it Up! is an independent, non-partisan campaign.

Anyone who wants an end to violence against women can join in our activities.

For more about the Step it Up! Campaign, see our website at: www.stepitupon-tario.ca and follow us on Facebook. Put your name, or your group's name on our endorsement list at: info@stepitupon-tario.ca

10 Steps to End Violence against Women

- Understand that violence against women is an equality rights issue.
- Recognize that male power is upheld by rape and sexual harassment.
- Stop racism and oppression; make Ontario accessible.
- End poverty—NOW!
- Provide fair access to justice for women.
- Create and maintain affordable housing, non-profit child care, training and education—NOW!
- Hold violent men accountable for their actions.
- Stop ‘criminalizing’ and ‘psychiatrizing’ women for men’s violence.
- Demand secure funding for women’s organizations.
- Listen to survivors and women’s advocates—they are the experts!

Planning and Leadership

1. Implement a gender and equity based analysis and approach to all provincial policy, legislation and budgeting that establishes specific goals, timelines and measures to ensure equity and gender equality in Ontario. Budgets can promote women’s equality or increase inequality, which then makes women more vulnerable to violence.
2. Establish and provide resources for a permanent Women’s Advocate Council on Violence Against Women with the Ontario Women’s Directorate to guide policy and program development on ending violence against women. Community-based members of the Council must include representatives of provincial anti-violence women’s organizations.

Stopping Sexual Assault, Rape and Sexual Harassment

1. Support and provide all necessary resources to ensure the implementation of Ontario’s four-year *Sexual Violence Action Plan*. Endorse that Action Plan implementation is guided by sexual assault survivors and women’s advocates from the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, DAWN Ontario and others working from a feminist, anti-racist/anti-oppressive framework.
2. Support an ongoing commitment beyond the four years of the current *Sexual Violence Action Plan*. Promise to revisit, reassess and realign the *Action Plan* every four years.
3. Promise to increase the funding for independent, community-based sexual assault centres. Send the message to all Ontarians that your government believes ending sexual violence against women and girls is important.
4. Repudiate the Superior Court of Ontario’s ruling (Justice Terrence Patterson) that a defendant’s *Charter* rights are violated when he is prohibited from using the defence of “excessive intoxication” in sexual assault cases. Ensure Crown Attorneys are trained to argue women’s Section 7 and 14 *Charter* rights in opposition to this defence.
5. Violence is not part of any job description and should not be condoned in any workplace. *The Occupational Health & Safety Act* now defines workplace violence as a hazard. Create strong regulations on training and consultation with workplace joint Health and Safety Committees.
6. The *Employment Standards Act* has provisions that include job protection for 10 weeks of compassionate leave. Expand the definition for compassionate leave to cover abused women who need time to address legal issues, find housing, arrange child care and have time to heal.
7. The *Human Rights Code*, *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and the *Employment Standards Act* need provisions guaranteeing abused women the right to workplace accommodations: expanded compassionate leave, the right to alternative work, flexible hours and job transfers are some necessary options.
8. Create, in consultation with women’s anti-violence and labour advocates, a multi-language public education campaign to ensure Ontario workers know their workplace rights and where to go for enforcement.
9. Expand the current restrictive compensation remedies of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to cover workers who experience harassment, verbal and emotional abuse.

10. Increase funding to women's organizations to provide support for women who experience harassment, and to develop community education programs.

Equity and Accessibility

1. Establish a mechanism for a mandatory equity and human rights budget review in all provincial Ministries and departments that would assess funding allocations and policy priorities based on the principle of equity and accessibility.
2. Establish and fully fund an engagement process with community and government stakeholders to support the creation of a Violence against Women and Equity Framework. Grassroots feminist anti-violence groups such as shelters, rape crisis and sexual assault centres and Aboriginal and immigrant women's groups must lead this work. (Guidelines for this work are outlined in the Ontario Women's Directorate report of the Domestic Violence Advisory Council, *Transforming Communities*.)
3. Provide annual access and equity training in all public and broader public sector services and regulatory bodies.
4. Expand funding under the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* to ensure that attendant care, assistive devices, alternate formats, ASL interpretation and other necessary accommodations are accessible to all women living with disabilities.
5. Provide all necessary resources to ensure full implementation of the provincial *Strategic Framework to End Violence against Aboriginal Women* developed by the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC). As stated in the progress 'report card' released on the *Framework* recommendations: "There have been some minor developments but improvements and further investments are required. This results in an overall failing grade. A comprehensive policy that endorses the framework and allocates resources to establish priorities and actions in partnership with ministries and Aboriginal partners is required."
6. As recommended by the Older Women's Network, adjust pension reform plans provincially, and urge reform federally to include, "acknowledgement of the number of Ontario women engaged in 'non-standard' employment (part-time, contract, temporary), recognition of the likelihood that women are often paid at the minimum wage, the disproportionate number of women 'employed' as unpaid family care givers, and the number of women who do not work in paid employment due to language difficulties or various disabilities, or who are on social assistance."
7. Amend the *Ontario Police Act* to instruct police services that their officers should not act in cooperation with the Canada Border Services Agency or other immigration officials to detain and arrest undocumented women with precarious immigration status who experience violence and abuse. All police services should enact 'Access without Fear' policies for migrant women who experience and report violence.
8. Implement policy for provincially funded community systems and services, in consultation with settlement and women's organizations, to ensure that undocumented women who experience violence can safely access services without fear of detention or deportation.
9. Ensure that social and community services are supported to create and implement Access without Fear policies and practices to ensure that undocumented women can use necessary services without fear.

The Issue

Between 1990 and 2010, at least 451 women, 57 children and 20 family or friends were murdered in Ontario during woman killings by abusive partners.

Reported assaults by partner of Aboriginal women are three times higher than reported assaults of non-Aboriginal women.

Over 8 of 10 victims of 'dating violence' are women. Between the ages of 15 and 34, rates of dating violence against women rise.

Almost every minute of every day in Canada, a woman or girl over the age of 15 is sexually assaulted.

Over 93% of reported adult sexual assault victims are female, while over 97% of accused are male.

Less than 1 in 10 sexual assaults are reported to police. Of those 16% are deemed "unfounded;" of the "founded," only 42% are charged. Of the charged, only 32% of prosecutions result in conviction.

The Facts

Women raising children in lone parent families are five times more likely to be poor than women in two-parent families.

Women account for 60% of minimum wage workers but minimum wages in all provinces are less than \$ 10 an hour. (In Ontario it is now \$ 10.25.)

Racialized women in Ontario make 85 cents for every dollar that non-racialized women make.

For lone parent families who rent, the number living in core housing need rose from 88,500 in 2001, to 93,000 in 2006.

Only 20% of young children have access to a regulated child care space for working mothers. Child care is the second highest cost for families.

10. As recommended by the Ontario Medical Association, drop the three-month OHIP wait period for new immigrants and returning Canadians. Lack of access to necessary health services can mean that abused women do not get necessary treatment and access to options for reporting violence.

Economic Security

1. Substantially increase both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support (ODSP) rates, indexed to the cost of living, to reflect true costs of basic needs across Ontario, especially safe housing and nutritious food. Reverse the intrusive measures and restrictions on the Special Diet Allowance.
2. Increase the Ontario Child Benefit for low-income families to \$1500 per child per year well before the current 2015 goal for reaching this level and without making other policy changes to cancel out the benefits of the increase.
3. Don't wait for a review to make changes to key policies of OW and ODSP. Increase allowable assets to \$5000 for a single person and \$10,000 for a family for receipt of assistance; exempt RSPs as assets and stop considering loans and child support payments as income.
4. Stop making women who experience violence pursue abusive fathers for child support payments. Make this policy consistent across Ontario.
5. End the minimum wage freeze. Raise the minimum wage to \$12.00 dollars per hour, indexed to the cost of living.
6. Provide subsidies and increased emergency funds for low-income families to offset rising electricity and heating costs in Ontario, especially within isolated communities.
7. In compliance with the *Poverty Reduction Act*, address specific issues of poverty for women, single mothers and disadvantaged communities within the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Develop a specific gender and equity plan for the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Social Assistance Review.
8. Take concrete steps to eliminate the gender pay gaps between women from all backgrounds and white Canadian-born men by:
 - Enacting policies that will require companies that receive government contracts of any kind to implement equity hiring targets for women on those contracts, particularly marginalized women.
 - Expanding funding and support for training and pre-apprenticeship programs targeted to women to prepare them for good-paying jobs in skilled trades and technology and other non-traditional employment. Access to high-paying, skilled work allows women to support their families and leave abusive situations.
 - Fully funding the years of pay equity adjustments currently owing to women providing important public services to Ontarians and maintain funding in the future. Fully fund the Pay Equity Commission and Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal so they can proactively monitor and address the pay equity compliance gap. Restore funding to the Pay Equity Legal Clinic to provide support for women in filing pay discrimination complaints. Develop pay equity measures to bring pay equity to those women who are excluded from the *Pay Equity Act*.
 - Reducing the barriers to women's full participation in the workforce by ensuring that child care is affordable and accessible to all, and by implementing employment equity targets and strategies that will work to make good-paying jobs available.

9. Take action to pressure the federal government to update employment standards and regulate recruitment practices to reduce the barriers that Temporary Foreign Workers face in accessing their employment standards rights. Temporary Foreign Workers also must have the right to collective representation and real access to human rights, health and safety protection and workers' compensation. Press for the extension of these protections to ALL workers under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.
10. Stop Wage Theft! As recommended by the Stop Wage Theft campaign, make all employers follow the law in all workplaces. Update labour laws to protect all workers. Ensure equal status and protection for all workers regardless of immigration status.

Housing

1. Provide sustained provincial funding to the federal/provincial Affordable Housing Program to build at least 10,000 affordable new homes annually.
2. Ensure ongoing adequate funding to make necessary repairs to existing housing stock to get it in satisfactory livable condition and then to maintain it in that condition.
3. As recommended by the Housing Network of Ontario, create a monthly Ontario Housing Benefit for all low-income Ontarians, whether or not they receive social assistance, to close the gap between increasing rents and low tenant incomes.
4. Protect the abuse priority for housing wait lists throughout the province. Until a monthly housing benefit is implemented, increase rent supplements and the number of these supplements designated for "domestic violence."
5. Ensure that any mechanism created to calculate rent-geared-to-income in social housing programs is based on net income and remove all measures that punish tenants for getting a job.

Publicly Funded Child Care

1. As recommended by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, invest \$100 million into improvements to the child care system in the province, including into stabilization of current programs, parent fees and child care worker salaries.
2. In consultation with shelter child advocate workers and survivors, develop a designated fund within the Ministry of Community and Social Services or the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to fund child care for children of women using shelters and second stage services to provide parental relief and to support women attending appointments/ meetings on violence related issues.

Education and Training

1. Restore access to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)—in place as standard policy before 1995—to recipients of OW and ODSP so that women, especially single mothers, can receive the education and training they need to leave social assistance.
2. Restore grants, not just loans, to the OSAP so that low income students, including abused women who return to school, are not saddled with huge debt loads upon graduation.

The Facts

Over half of family court parties are not represented by a lawyer in family court. Only the poorest are eligible for Legal Aid in Ontario.

Almost half of women who experience violence feel unsafe during family court processes in Ontario family courts.

Shelters, sexual assault centres and women's community-based and neighbourhood centres are chronically underfunded, but women who experience violence often report that these services are the places where they received the most support and accurate information about the systems.

Funding for women's services in rural and Northern communities, especially within Aboriginal communities, is typically lower than funding in urban areas of Ontario.

Listen to Survivors

“I did four years of army training. I can sleep in the woods. I can survive in minus 30 weather with 50 lbs on my back and a dogsled. And I’ve been a single mother on welfare. Single parenthood is harder.”

“... at least in a lot of racialized, marginalized communities, we work the hardest. My mom works 12 hour shifts every single day... Still there is a struggle with money.”

“One of the hardest parts of not having someone stand beside you is that he’s across the room and he’s got his lawyer and you’re standing there by yourself and you feel like you have nobody with you and you’re intimidated.”

“I didn’t have any family and the community kept us very sheltered. It is not just the mainstream I am dealing with. It’s also my cultural aspects and perceived ideas of the mainstream about certain cultures.”

‘How am I going to pay for daycare and transportation and all that goes with being a single parent and a homemaker? How am I going to do this without this person in my life whose only good quality is that he is a good provider?’

Providing Access to Justice

1. Increase and annualize funding for full-time legal support workers in independent women’s services across Ontario, especially for supporting women within the family law system. The March announcement of \$2 million for over three years was a welcome first step and important recognition of the need for family court support for women experiencing violence, but more resources are needed to protect women and children in the current family law system.
2. Eliminate income testing for the two-hour free legal aid certificate in all Ontario shelters serving women who experience abuse.
3. Identify and provide supports and resources necessary for abused women to access the legal system, particularly in rural and northern communities where courts may be located hours from the community women live in and where there is inadequate or no public transportation.
4. Amend provincial law to extend property rights protection to common law couples.
5. Increase family law legal aid funding and revise legal aid eligibility rules to include more women, protect women’s assets, address the increasing numbers of unrepresented women in family law matters and to implement the changes recommended above.
6. Amend the ‘conflict’ rule that prevents a woman using a legal aid certificate from hiring any lawyer she has previously seen as a “duty counsel” or Family Law Information Centre (FLIC) lawyer.

Holding Abusers Accountable; Supporting, Not Punishing Women

1. Pressure the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to rescind the newly enacted directive allowing Canada Border Services agents to enter anti-violence women’s shelters to arrest undocumented women. Women are often reported to CBSA by abusers or by police investigating ‘domestic’ assaults. Ensure that OPP/local police services do not collude with abusers to keep undocumented women trapped in violence.
2. Oppose the federal government’s proposed “Conditional Permanent Residence” for sponsored spouses that would require a two-year wait for permanent residency status for spouses and partners (usually women) who are newly married/partnered with their sponsor. This legislation, if passed, would endanger newcomer women by making them choose between violence and deportation.
3. As recommended by the OWD Advisory Council on ‘Domestic Violence’, ensure that government policy continues to address violence against women as a gender-based issue requiring a specific focus on the material conditions of women’s lives and the ongoing inequality women in Ontario face economically, socially and politically.
4. Educate all systems overseen by the Ontario government to stop labelling, ‘psychiatrizing’, and ‘criminalizing’ women for the violence they experience. Some examples: ensure family law and child protection systems hold abusers, not mothers accountable for child exposure to violence; insist that police stop ‘dual’ charging of women in woman abuse cases. Monitor systems for improvements in their approach to survivors.
5. Provide funding to independent community-based women’s centres and Aboriginal women’s services for increased education efforts to de-bunk the continuing myths about sexual assault, sexual harassment and rape resulting in incidents such as the misguided ‘advice’ to women not to dress as ‘sluts’ in order to avoid sexual assault.

Funding women's services and independent survivor-led groups

1. Immediately increase core funding to ensure at least financial and program parity for Aboriginal on-reserve shelters with women's off-reserve shelters in Ontario. Lobby federal officials to stabilize and make permanent federal funding to Aboriginal women's services in Canada. Ensure that off-reserve Aboriginal women's shelters are also provided with adequate funds to meet the critical needs of Aboriginal women.
2. Provide \$4.5 million for community-based women's centres to provide annualized core funding to all local women's centres and women's equity-seeking advocacy groups. Continuing unstable funding for these local centres is unacceptable. Funding must ensure that immigrant women's centres are included, especially considering the funding cuts made to immigrant services by the Harper government.
3. Advocate with the federal government for the reinstatement of recently cancelled federal funding for Ontario immigrant-serving agencies, including immigrant women's centres and settlement services. Increase funding from the province for LINC classes, anti-violence programs, training, and settlement supports.
4. The Francophone women's community needs to see improvement in the policies and programs in order to ensure that the development of French language services responds to the unique needs of Francophone women in terms of access, capacity building, continuity of FLS services, and governance. Francophone women have worked to improve access to French language services in many areas of the province, but new services and additional support for existing services is needed.
5. Allocate \$10 million annually for training, coordination and development work for provincial women's anti-violence and equity organizations engaged in this work.
6. Increase core funding of women's shelters and second-stage housing programs by 4% each year for the next 4 years to address outstanding and increasing funding shortfalls in violence against women's community-based services across Ontario.
7. Provide publicly funded access to transportation for children using emergency shelters and second stage services so that when it is safe to do so, children can maintain attendance at schools and child care services in their home communities during their stay in emergency residential services.
8. Create a joint community/government task force within the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), including representatives of all anti-violence and equality seeking provincial women's organizations, to develop an action plan, with targets and timelines, for addressing continuing inadequacy of, and disparities in funding and access to women's shelters and second stage programs across Ontario, with particular regard to shelters serving Aboriginal women.
9. Provide increased annualized funding for independent women's survivor-led groups working to end violence against women, as well as start-up funding support for survivors to establish new survivor-led initiatives or groups dedicated to supporting women and children in local communities.

Listen to Survivors

"I was diagnosed and given meds but couldn't ask questions. I wanted to know why in their infinite wisdom, after knowing me for an hour they could make a diagnosis?"

"I was told that I needed to find an apartment that was \$350.00 a month all included. All I could find for that kind of money was a room. It was dirty and shared a bathroom with three other people. I feel so degraded. I never thought I'd have to live like this."

"It's how the welfare people treat you. It's how the housing people treat you. It's how the police treat you. Poverty and single parenthood for women - we're expected to do the impossible."

"I am completely reliant on my husband and his pension. But I volunteered in this country for 20 years. I worked in my home. Where is my pension?"

"I can't think about my future as a woman, a senior citizen with a mental disability... We need to get some type of politician in there who has a heart."

"Where do we go for help? To the Premier? What are the names and numbers of those we should call?"



Step it Up! includes all women in Ontario

When we use the words "woman/women" we have in mind a world that values all women.

We know that different women experience violence differently. For example, a woman's race, religion, socioeconomic status, age or sexual identity affects how she experiences gender-based violence, her level of risk for experiencing violence, as well as resources accessible to her in her healing from violence.

When we say "violence against women" we mean "all violence against all women," including, but not limited to:

First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, women of colour, elder women, teenaged women, women living with disabilities (recognizing all types of disabilities), immigrant and refugee women, non-status and undocumented women, Francophone women, homeless women, women engaged in substance use, women in conflict with the law, women experiencing or labelled with mental health issues, women living in poverty, two-spirited women, lesbians, trans and intersex women, women who are sex workers, and women living in remote or rural areas.

While this is not a comprehensive list, it gives a clear representation of the spirit with which the word "woman" is used throughout Step It Up! documents, whereby no woman is left out and all are valued.

For Parties and Candidates—what you can do

Put *our* platform into *your* platform!

These Step it Up! Campaign measures for addressing violence against women in Ontario can be accomplished in the next four years—if the political will is there.

Your party can be a leader in helping to end violence against women in Ontario. Make a commitment today to adopt our 'platform' steps for all women and children in Ontario.

Work with survivors and women's advocates in our mutual efforts to protect the human and equality rights of all women and children across the province.

For Ontario Voters—what you can do

Here are some ways to get candidates interested in the issue:


1. Contact your local candidates and send (or bring) this Step it Up! 'platform' to them. Ask them to send you a response to the steps outlined here. Send them a fax, email or letter supporting the Step it Up! Campaign.
2. Send this 'platform' to your local newspaper with a Letter to the Editor asking local candidates to announce their plans for ending violence against women and poverty in Ontario. Don't just do it once. Do it throughout the election campaign.
3. Call your local women's and neighbourhood centres and services to join in any activities to raise issues of violence against women in the coming election.
4. If there are no local groups already working on violence against women in your community, contact Step it Up! for support to start your own campaign.
5. Hand out our flyers and other Step it Up! materials—like this 'newsletter'—at all-candidates meetings and community events about the election, or at local transit stops, shopping areas and other places in your community where folks gather. The Step it Up! website will have information to use throughout the period until the election on October 6th. Our website: www.stepitupontario.ca.
6. Check out and respond to the platforms that all of the political parties will be posting on their websites and let them know what you think about their platforms. If there is no plan addressing violence against women, ask them why not. Here are the websites for the four major parties:

Liberal Party of Ontario: <http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/>

Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario: <http://www.ontariopc.com/>

New Democratic Party of Ontario: <http://ontariondp.com/en/>

Green Party of Ontario: <http://www.gpo.ca/>

7. Endorse the Step it Up! Campaign 'platform' by sending your email to the Campaign at info@stepitupontario.ca. 'Like us' at Facebook at 



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