



## **Ministry of Finance Provincial Budget 2024 Submission**

### **Submitted By:**

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**Tuesday January 30th, 2024**

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy  
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Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy,

On behalf of the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH) please accept this submission to the Ministry of Finance Budget 2024 Consultation. OAITH is a provincial association representing 88 VAW Shelters, Transitional Housing and Community-Based Organizations. Together we aim to end all forms of gender-based violence through advocacy, government relations, research, training and public awareness. Established in 1977, OAITH is a leader in informing public policy, funding advocacy, developing and delivering evidence-based training and leading broad based public awareness campaigns.

Through extensive engagement with our members, OAITH has submitted numerous recommendations to government ministries, committees and consultations on the various pressure points, systemic gaps and failures, legislative change, funding issues and solutions to problems that continue to present themselves. One of these extensive engagements with our membership culminated into a comprehensive report [Shelter Realities: Building Towards a Sustainable Future \(2017\)](#), that has been foundational to the recommendations we've made to the government.

Shelter Realities contains key recommendations for change about funding, responding to client complexity, government coordination, prevention, advocacy, human resource challenges, equity, learning and innovation. Through OAITH's work and steady focus on strengthening the gender-based violence service system we've seen funding enhancements for Child and Youth Programs, Transitional Housing and Support Worker Program, and the Family Court Support Worker Program. In 2023/2024, stabilization funding to address the human resource challenges facing the sector was provided. It has been demonstrated through these changes and enhancements that some of our recommendations are being implemented, however there is much more that needs to be done to reach a sustainable state focused on outcomes.

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As the Ontario government now has a bilateral agreement and a funded provincial strategy to align with the National Action Plan, it is our hope that the government will continue examining the many recommendations OAITH has made. As you are likely aware, OAITH reported in [November that 62 women and children were killed in Ontario in 1 year](#) and this is an increase from the year prior. Our situation as a society is only getting worse, not better. Our member and ally organizations made up of shelters, transitional/supportive housing and community organizations have long held the solutions for change—we need your collaboration, your will and commitment to end all forms of gender-based violence in Ontario. We would like to see that Budget 2024 clearly demonstrates this commitment to ending gender based violence in Ontario through the consideration of the following:

**Housing and the creation of housing related supports** are key to preventing femicides in Ontario. Our members have reported that the primary systemic barrier to living without violence and harm for them and their children is access to housing. While housing development is underway we need solutions now so that survivors can afford the housing that is currently available. Shelters can now be called temporary housing and we no longer have an emergency shelter system. Our members have reported that their average length of stay in 2022/2023 was 169 days while the year prior it was 142 days. The length of stay in just 1 year has increased by 4 weeks. As each day passes survivors and their children sit and wait to leave the shelter, while others can't leave the violence they are enduring at all. In fact 39 of our member organizations reported that in 2022-2023 they had to refer 6,186 survivors to other services because they had no bed space to accommodate their families. While they refer to other services it doesn't mean shelter space is found. With 95 shelters funded by MCCSS we know this is a significant underestimation of the true numbers and our members need some relief to address this bottleneck to support the families they are working with.

**Prevention Based Programs** are key to changing and transforming how we respond and reduce rates of gender-based violence and femicide overall. Programs and evaluated models already exist that can be leveraged across entire service systems in Ontario with different segments of the population. Unless we focus on prevention we will continue to respond to growing rates of violence and hatred. This is costly on won't create change. Prevention programs need to be framed and based on facts, address the belief systems that uphold behaviours, acknowledge the systems of oppression that perpetuate these experiences and the values that lead our society towards hatred and harm. We need to build safer and more equitable communities based on compassion and care.

**60 million dollars into the core operating budgets of shelters provincially** to match inflation and the rising costs of operating, programming, wages, transportation, groceries, insurance, benefits, digitization, IT infrastructure, administration and accountability reporting requirements. Much needed stabilization funds were provided in the final quarter of 23/24. As we move forward with Ontario STANDS further work is needed to plan for longer term sustainability for these organizations to address historical and structural funding flaws creating inequity and depleted services.

**Recruitment, retention and training investments** to address our staffing challenges in VAW Shelters must be a priority. Through data collected by OAITH between November 2023 and January 2024 (n=39 member organizations), more absence was attributed to short term leaves, long term leaves and illness, while only 39% were on vacation. Burnout, long hours, critical workplace incidents and complex co-living environments have depleted our skilled workforce. Nearly 40% of our Executive Directors have left. Base rates of pay need to be established for the sector along with ensuring double staffing is established and funded in all shelters. Currently there is an 11.00 an hour pay difference between relief staff in shelters and nearly half of our workforce relies on relief and casual labour, yet 77% have reported a relief staff shortage.

**Provide operational funding for all existing VAW transitional housing/supportive housing programs.** Transitional and supportive housing is foundational for survivors to move out of shelter while still maintaining support and safety before living independently. This will further assist in addressing the bottleneck on housing wait lists and emergency shelters. With the development and new builds of supportive housing, gender-based violence organizations can play a key role in both the development and the delivery of service in these settings. Where municipalities are leading the development they can work with and leverage the existing gbv service system and programs for operations and life stabilization programs to better support survivors of gender-based violence.

**Invest into employment, training and education** programs to help survivors return to the workforce, upskill and reduce the barriers they face. Gender-based violence organizations provide an existing access point for services that encompasses a wrap-around approach. There are unique opportunities to expand and leverage access to employment and training programs into these settings, where they don't already exist. Further to this, there are opportunities to leverage the expertise of organizations who are leaders in training and education to train and do capacity building with employers hiring women and gender-diverse people into male dominated settings. To reduce employment barriers and achieve long term success for those accessing these

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programs, conditions need to be created to allow for equitable, responsive and safer workplaces. Creating cultural change within male dominated professions is required to create Better Jobs in Ontario.

**Transitional (Liveable) Income Benefit for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence**

should be created and piloted across Ontario. This would provide enough money to afford a place to live, to feed their children, to attend school/job training, to have access to the internet and a cell phone, to have access to childcare and transportation.

Ensuring there is access to a gender-based violence advocate worker to support them through the service system and address trauma related impacts, safety and risk that survivors are navigating during this process. Only when we create the conditions for success will that success be achieved.

**Investments into community-based services**, to provide programs for those who cause harm and have perpetrated violence as an early intervention strategy.

Community-based services play a role in ensuring those who cause harm have access to trauma-based counselling, employment, housing, substance use programs and parenting programs. Waiting for an intervention to occur with police and the court system is not only costly, but costs women and children their lives.

**Investments for gbv-specific trauma-informed services** under the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, so that VAW shelters can effectively deliver gbv-informed trauma and substance use services. More women and gender-diverse individuals experiencing the impacts of trauma related to gender-based violence across their life span have been killed by toxic drug supply than they have from femicide.

It is my hope that the above recommendations and stated solutions will build your understanding but also inspire the Ministry of Finance and the Government of Ontario to work and collaborate with gender-based violence organizations to change the trajectory we're on. Our member organizations and more importantly those needing safety and support are counting on it for Budget 2024.

I look forward to our continued work together!

Sincerely,



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