



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

**Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy  
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)  
Written Submission**

**Submitted to: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
November 28, 2025**

**Submitted by: Lauren Hancock, Policy & Research Coordinator**

## **Background**

### Organizational Background

Established in 1977, the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH) is a provincial association that represents close to 90 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) shelters, transitional housing and GBV community-based organizations. OAITH works with member organizations to strengthen the services they offer through training, research, education, public awareness, prevention and advocacy.

### Process

As a part of the consultation process to review Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy OAITH distributed the survey to its membership with the invitation for member organizations to further distribute the survey amongst their staff. The provincial survey was adapted to better reflect the organizational structures and needs of our members and was also shared amongst our membership. Respondents were able to share their own organizational experiences as well as shared the experiences of those accessing their services, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

### Respondent Composition

A total of 28 surveys were received, 23 of which were fully completed. The five incomplete surveys provided organizational information only and did not provide feedback on the questions specific to the consultation and as such were removed from the analysis. Members from each of the five MCCSS regions completed the survey (39% East, 26% North, 13% Central, 13% Toronto, 9% West). Respondents were asked about their organization type and most commonly reported their organization was a standalone shelter organization (52%) or included both shelter and transitional housing within their organization (30%). Three respondents (13%) identified themselves as ally members of OAITH and one organization (4%) operates a standalone transitional housing organization.

Research has shown that GBV can have widespread impacts on survivors' lives, affecting their physical and mental wellbeing, impacting their access to housing and increasing poverty, disrupting work/employment and creating economic instability (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2024). Those living in poverty may also be at an increased risk for experiencing violence, with rates estimating 57% of women living in poverty have also experienced GBV (Jaffray, 2021). While there are limitations to the overall sample size included within this study, respondents have unique and valuable insights to share as it relates to women and gender-diverse individuals' intersection experiences with violence and poverty.

## **Survivor and Organizational Experiences of Poverty**

### Survivor Income, Employment and Access to Housing

Survey respondents were asked to share information about survivors' main sources of income and their employment status. Gendered caregiving roles and responsibilities are important considerations as it relates to survivors' ability to access employment. Survey respondents shared that while survivors were actively looking for full time (61% or 14/23) and part time work (43% or 10/23) many survivors were commonly not looking for work due to family or personal responsibilities (70% or 16/23), had been unemployed for a long time (65% 15/23) or were not looking for work because of a disability (57% or 13/23). The data also highlighted the precarious nature of employment for many survivors of violence. Respondents noted survivors were commonly employed as part-time workers (52% or 12/23), working multiple jobs (39% 9/23) or working in casual work (39% or 9/23). Many survivors who are leaving violent relationships or other forms of GBV may have unique impacts on their employment as a result of their experiences of violence. Trauma, safety risk and histories of financial abuse and disruption to employment histories/experience can create barriers and have negative impacts on survivor's ability to access decent, livable wages and employment further entrenching them in poverty (Woman ACT, 2022). Recognizing the complex barriers to employment related to experiences of violence and gendered experiences of poverty will be important considerations in future poverty reduction efforts.

In addition, the survey data illustrated that survivors were most commonly accessing income support through Ontario Works (100% or 23/23) and the Ontario Disability and Support Program (91% or 21/23). The next most common sources of income that were reported for survivors were the Canada Child Benefit (78% or 18/23), income from a job (61% or 14/23) and Old Age Security (39% or 9/23). This data is helpful in identifying survivor's experiences of poverty and in understanding the specific populations (mothers, older women, women with disabilities) that are experiencing poverty and the barriers they may face in moving out of poverty. Expanding employment opportunities for women in shelters and providing specialized services to reduce barriers to employment (e.g. childcare and transportation). Opportunities for education, skill training and apprenticeships for women can also be expanded to help with job training and preparing survivors to re-enter the workforce and obtain liveable wages. Considering that the top three most common sources of income for survivors was reported to be government benefits, it is important to ensure that these benefits reflect the needs of those accessing them and reflect the actual current costs of living. Without adequate income supports, these benefits will continue to fall short and further entrench individuals in poverty rather than support their path out of poverty.

Respondents shared data regarding the housing situation of survivors accessing their services and identified trends of precarious and unstable housing options among survivors of violence. Respondents noted that survivors were most commonly staying with friends/family or couchsurfing (74% or 17/23), living in their car or outdoors (70% or 16/23), renting in the private market (70% or 16/23) or staying in shelter (65% or 15/23). Some respondents also noted that survivors were living in houses they or their family owned (61% or 14/23) or in subsidized government housing (57% or 13/23). There are many intersections within GBV and homelessness, with survivors being forced out of their homes to find safety and also facing a greater risk of experiencing GBV without safe housing (Baker, Lalonde & Tabibi, 2017). Without safe and affordable housing survivors may face barriers to employment and therefore to exiting poverty, making the current housing crisis an important consideration within ongoing poverty reduction initiatives.

#### Survivors' Ability to Afford Basic Needs

Respondents were asked to report on the current experiences of survivors accessing their services, and their ability to pay for basic necessities. Respondents noted that survivors were *always* (57% or 13/23), *often* (35% or 8/23) and *sometimes* (8% or 2/23) struggling to pay for basic needs like food, utilities, transportation or clothing. No respondent indicated that survivors were rarely or never struggling to afford the rising costs of living, highlighting the financial impact this continues to have on survivors of violence. As noted previously, many survivors accessing services are either employed or accessing various income supports, such as OW, ODSP and child support or benefits. Despite this, survivors continue to struggle to afford basic necessities for themselves and their children. Respondents shared that there is “*More reliance on food banks/food programs*” and more “*donations to meet basic needs*” among their clients [Survey Respondent]. Another respondent shared that while their organization can support those staying in shelter by supplying them with basic necessities, those living in the community continue to struggle, including those who have transitioned out of the shelter into the community. Without basic needs for themselves and their families, survivors face barriers to life stabilization. Survivors may be forced to make decisions between what basic needs can be met. As one respondent noted “*Food insecurity is rising, and families should not have to choose between safety and nourishment*”. [Survey Respondent]. Poverty reduction efforts must consider how the rising costs of living has impacted individuals' ability to afford basic necessities and directly work to address these costs.

#### Organizational Ability to Afford Basic Needs

Organizations providing shelter and/or transitional housing supports have unique expenses given the nature of congregate care and living. As the cost of living increases

many of the organizations face increasing financial pressures related to food costs and high grocery bills, increasing utilities and high transportation costs. While better equipped to support the increasing costs compared to survivors themselves, several organizations identified challenges with the rising costs. One respondent (4%) noted their organization *always* struggles to afford the rising costs of food and other basic needs, while ten respondents indicated they *often* (22% or 5/23) and *sometimes* (22% or 5/23) struggle with the rising costs. Two respondents (8%) noted that they *rarely* struggle with the costs and five organizations (22%) noted they are *never* challenged with the current costs of living. Five organizations (22%) preferred not to share this data. The current rising costs of living has meant that organizations must find ways to fill gaps in funding. One organization shared “*Priorities have shifted in spending due to increase in operating costs/basic needs*” [Survey Respondent], while another shared about the reliance on fundraising to help support their increasing operational costs. The reliance on fundraising means that organizations may risk falling short on the cost of basic necessities potentially impacting other services. Due to the caregiving responsibilities within GBV organizations, many organizations are feeling the increasing financial pressures associated with high inflation and the rising costs of living.

## **Community Affordability Issues and Solutions**

### Housing

The most commonly identified affordability issue within respondents’ communities is housing. All respondents that answered this question (\*two respondents did not answer) noted this was the biggest issue was the lack of safe and affordable housing options in both the public and private markets, echoing the larger housing crisis that is evident throughout Ontario (University of Toronto - School of Cities, 2025). As reported by survey respondents, many survivors accessing their services are living in precarious, unstable and/or vulnerable housing situations, such as within shelters, couchsurfing, living in a vehicle or outdoors. Without housing, survivors face barriers to escaping violence and also in exiting poverty, as this creates additional barriers to finding, securing and maintaining employment (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2008; Aleman, 2016). Recognizing housing as a human right is an important first step in addressing the intersection between homelessness and poverty. More action must be taken across all levels of government, however, to improve housing supply, affordability and attainability.

While specific programs, such as the Special Priority Program and the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit have been created to support survivors of violence with accessing housing, the lack of stock, long wait times and delays and high rates of private market rent hinders survivors ability to benefit or access these programs. The lack of housing stock in both the private and public spheres is a continuous barrier to getting survivors

housed and must be addressed as a part of overall poverty reduction efforts. Additionally, supporting GBV organizations through the development of transitional housing units and buildings may be a promising initiative to help survivors access more long-term housing while continuing to access wrap-around supports, assisting with overall life stabilization.

### Increasing Costs of Living

Respondents also noted the food costs (13 mentions) and the costs of other basic personal needs (13 mentions), such as clothing, personal hygiene supplies, utilities, transportation and childcare continue to be major concerns for survivors within their communities. Survivors struggling to afford basic personal needs not only serves to keep them in poverty but also creates barriers to accessing and maintaining meaningful employment. For example, without safe and affordable transportation, survivors may not be able to regularly attend their jobs. This is especially true within northern, rural and remote areas that have smaller or at times non-existent public transportation infrastructure. Furthermore, the lack of affordable childcare may also serve as a barrier to employment as many survivors may have limited financial or physical support from their partners, further entrenching poverty among single mothers. As identified by survey respondents, many survivors are employed precariously, working part-time, casually and at-times working multiple jobs. In order to be beneficial to all families, childcare must not only be affordable but must also be flexible and reflect the needs of different employment types, not simply between traditional working hours. Many survivors may also be faced with extensive legal fees related to family court or other proceedings. Ensuring community members can afford basic necessities will help promote access to decent work and assist in lifting women and children out of poverty.

### Social Service Infrastructure

In addition to the financial burdens of the rising costs of living, survivors and communities are also struggling with an under-resourced social service system and face lengthy wait times to accessing necessary social services that would further assist them in life stabilization, employment and getting out of poverty. When asked what kinds of supports would most help organizations or communities with affordability, nearly all respondents indicated they needed additional mental health and addictions services (91% or 21/23). Research has found intersections between mental illness, addiction challenges and poverty (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2020). The current wait times and delays for survivors to be able to access these necessary services has an overall impact on their ability to work towards stabilization, employment and to transition out of poverty. Ensuring that poverty reduction efforts specifically work to address the current capacity gaps in social services will be necessary to provide sustainable pathways out of poverty.

In order to address poverty, Ontario's future poverty reduction efforts must not only consider pathways to employment such as education and job training but also the specific factors that entrench individuals in poverty. The lack of safe and affordable housing, transportation and childcare, for example, may hinder survivor's abilities to access and sustain meaningful employment that would help them and their families out of poverty. Barriers to employment, such as the lack of affordable housing, transportation and childcare may prevent survivors from accessing decent work with livable wages, deepening the poverty they experience. It is also important to consider the population that are most affected and most vulnerable within poverty reduction efforts. When looking at the various sources of incomes, further insights about the populations served within shelter can be gathered. As noted by respondents, many survivors are accessing income support through the Ontario Disability Support Program, Canada-Child Benefit and/or Old Age Security benefits, suggesting that many survivors are living with disabilities, have families/caregiver responsibilities or are older women. Those living with disabilities may have limitations on their ability to be employed and may be forced into precarious or casual employment (Morris et al 2018). Without adequate income support that reflects the actual costs of living, those living with disabilities can become further entrenched in poverty. Older women may also experience barriers to employment related to their age or even age-based discrimination when trying to re-enter the workforce or access services. This data reinforces the need for a holistic approach to poverty reduction that recognizes the barriers to employment that some populations face and ensures the available income supports reflect the actual needs of those accessing them. Ensuring that poverty reduction efforts extend beyond just employment training will help to ensure that all populations can be supported out of poverty.

### **Recommended Priorities and Actions for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Respondents were asked to share how the next provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy could be designed to support the needs of survivors and their communities more broadly. The following recommendations have been informed by the survey respondents and echo the above noted challenges, limitations and barriers to exiting poverty. Poverty reduction efforts must be holistic, measured and reflect the needs of the most vulnerable affected populations, including mothers, women and gender-diverse individuals living with disabilities and older women, providing multiple pathways out of poverty.

## Housing

1. Prioritization of housing first models with wraparound supports that provide stability and safe, affordable housing as a foundation for employment and eradicating poverty.
2. Invest in capital and operational funding to support GBV organizations with the creation and operation of transitional housing units to help survivors transition out of shelter and into safe and affordable housing.
3. Creation of affordable units to alleviate current wait-times within social housing, allowing the Special Priority Program to run more efficiently and get individuals housed in a timely manner. Units must reflect the community needs and ensure large families are not facing indirect discrimination in accessing housing due to the size of their family.
4. Additional protections for renters within the private market including limitations on rental increases and strengthening protections against racial and faith-based discriminations.
5. Enhancing access to rent supplement programs (increasing availability, reducing documentation barriers, new and sustained investments into the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit).

## Wrap Around Supports and Benefits

1. Ensure coordinated and intersectoral approach to addressing poverty, recognizing the many intersections with gender and racial inequality, age and/or family-based discrimination, homelessness and experiences of violence and addressing the various systemic barriers that entrench individuals in poverty.
2. Address barriers to current services by ensuring that services are accessible, trauma-informed and culturally responsive.
3. Invest in mental health services to improve access and reduce wait times to accessing important wrap around services and support.
4. Invest in addiction services to improve access and reduce wait times to accessing important wrap around services and support.
5. Strengthen transportation infrastructure to expand access to community services, appointments, childcare and employment. Without safe and affordable transportation, individuals face additional barriers to escaping violence and poverty, especially those living in rural and remote areas.
6. Address the high costs of food and high rates of food insecurity.
7. Expand/increase access to \$10/ day childcare, ensuring affordability and also flexible shifts that reflect the needs of families within the community.
8. Support survivors with continued, sustainable investments into legal aid and legal support for survivors of violence for family law, housing and other legal needs.

9. Create preventative approaches that work with children and families, including mentorship programs, parenting workshops and educational and economic opportunities for youth that can help to prevent intergenerational poverty.

#### Income Support

1. Increase the current rates of Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to meet the current costs of living and inflation rates. Current income supports do not meet the actual needs or costs of those accessing them.
2. Provide universal basic income to ensure community members can afford the basic necessities like shelter, food, childcare, clothing and transportation and increasing costs of living.
3. Increase amounts of child benefits, ensuring that children do not fall into poverty.
4. Increase minimum wage ensuring all working individuals can access a livable and decent wage that reflects the current costs of living and rates of inflation.

#### Education, Skills Development and Job Training

1. Create pathways to employment that recognize foreign credentials, work experience and lived experience.
2. Ongoing investments in micro-credentialing, skill development and flexible training opportunities designed for women re-entering the workforce.
3. Enhance online digital literacy skills
4. Continue to expand digital infrastructure throughout Ontario, ensuring that connectivity does not serve as a barrier to employment for those living in northern, rural and remote areas.

## Works Cited

Aleman, A. 2016. Employment and Homelessness. Homeless Hub.  
<https://homelesshub.ca/blog/2016/employment-homelessness/#:~:text=Other%20barriers%20to%20employment%20among,%2C%20and/or%20sex%20work.>

Baker, L., Lalonde, D., Tabibi, J. 2017. Women, Intimate Partner Violence and Homelessness. The Learning Network.  
[https://www.gbvllearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased\\_newsletters/issue-22/Newsletter\\_Issue\\_22-Online1.pdf](https://www.gbvllearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-22/Newsletter_Issue_22-Online1.pdf)

Canadian Women's Foundation. 2024. The Facts about Gender-Based Violence.  
<https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/gender-based-violence/>

Center for Mental Health and Addiction. 2020. Mental Illness and Addiction: Facts and Statistics.  
<https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/the-crisis-is-real/mental-health-statistics#:~:text=Canadians%20in%20the%20lowest%20income,poor%20to%20fair%20mental%20health.&text=Studies%20in%20various%20Canadian%20cities,may%20have%20a%20mental%20illness.>

Jaffray, B. 2021. Intimate partner violence: Experiences of sexual minority women in Canada, 2018, Statistics Canada, 2021.  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00005-eng.htm>

Morris, S., G. Fawcett, L. Brisebois, and J. Hughes. (2018). A Demographic, Employment, and Income Profile of Canadians with Disabilities Aged 15 Years and Over, 2017. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-654-X2018002. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

University of Toronto - School of Cities. 2025. Ontario's Housing Crisis Explained.  
[https://schoolofcities.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/School-of-Cities\\_Housing-Crisis-Final3.pdf#:~:text=Housing%20prices%20are%20overvalued%2C%20increas%2D%20ingly%20out,and%20regulations%20to%20solve%20the%20unaffordability%20crisis.](https://schoolofcities.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/School-of-Cities_Housing-Crisis-Final3.pdf#:~:text=Housing%20prices%20are%20overvalued%2C%20increas%2D%20ingly%20out,and%20regulations%20to%20solve%20the%20unaffordability%20crisis.)

Women ACT. 2022. Employment sabotage and disruption as a form of economic abuse The intersections between employment and intimate partner violence.  
[https://womanact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WomanACT\\_Issue-Brief-Employment-Sabotage.pdf](https://womanact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WomanACT_Issue-Brief-Employment-Sabotage.pdf)