



**February 25, 2022**

Hon. Chrystia Freeland  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance  
Department of Finance Canada  
90 Elgin Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
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**Re: OMSSA 2022 Canada Budget Submission**

Dear Minister Freeland,

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is a non-profit association whose members are Ontario's Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). Our 47 members appreciate the opportunity to provide consultation on the upcoming 2022 Federal Budget.

**Housing and Homelessness:**

In Ontario, community housing and homelessness prevention programs are co-funded, planned and administered by our 47 Service System Managers. OMSSA and its members work with the provincial and federal governments to improve access and affordability across the full spectrum of housing options in communities across Ontario.

Our members are supportive of the renewed federal investment in community housing through the National Housing Strategy. We also appreciate a close working relationship with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

Ontario's 47 Service System Managers are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. The new Omicron variant has increased cases, stretched hospital capacity, and put additional pressure on the overall health system including long-term care. It has also led to increased challenges to municipalities who are supporting homeless populations through local shelter and community housing systems.

The Safe Restart Agreement, and related provincial Social Services Relief Fund, was vital in providing support to municipalities facing increased costs as a result of the pandemic



response. It is clear that the pandemic has not ended, and ***additional supports are needed to protect the most vulnerable homeless populations in communities across Ontario.***

Ontario is currently facing a housing affordability and rental vacancies crisis. The Golden Horseshoe Area was at the centre of this housing crisis but now this issue has expanded into rural and Northern areas in all communities across Ontario. Enhancing the National Housing Strategy, Rapid Housing Initiative, rental housing incentives, and portable housing benefits is needed to address challenges related to the lack of affordability around housing.

There is an urgent need to expand community housing units to meet growing demand in Ontario communities. Homelessness is not just an urban problem. Encampments and visible homelessness have become present in many Ontario communities. Homeless populations are growing in all communities in Ontario as housing and rental costs increase. Often times, the wait to secure a community housing unit is many years in Ontario and providers are facing severe repair backlogs.

Currently only 25 out of the 47 Service System Managers are eligible for the Reaching Home program despite needs in all 47 Ontario service manager communities. ***Eligibility should be expanded so that all of Ontario's 47 Service System Managers qualify for funding*** under this and all federal programs relating to housing and homelessness.

Municipalities also report that the National Housing Strategy Co-Investment Fund application is complex, time-consuming and creates administrative burdens. It is also a loan-based program. ***Federal Grants and dedicated long-term funding is needed,*** given the limited ability for the municipal level of government to take on debt.

In Ontario, the municipal level of government is the service system manager responsible for funding the majority of community housing costs locally. This is putting pressure on property taxpayers and municipal budgets as communities try and keep up with the growing demand in the face of surging rental costs and a lack of affordable housing.

***OMSSA supports a national Urban Indigenous Housing Strategy*** and is committed to Truth and Reconciliation. We believe our members and the human services sectors have a key role to play in Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities across Ontario.

***OMSSA also believes a national poverty reduction strategy is needed as part of Canada's economic recovery from the pandemic.*** We must make sure that no Canadian is left behind and that we can build back better once COVID subsidies. Both items align with the work of our members and provide them with the tools to address these complimentary issues in their communities.

Finally, ***OMSSA believes a joint federal, provincial, and municipal summit is required to coordinate on affordable housing issues with community housing as a top priority*** in these discussions.



Ontario faces long wait lists, repair backlogs, and a shortage of units. Many co-op and non-profit providers are approaching the end of their mortgages and require significant investment and support so that they can remain viable and part of the system or face the situation of selling these assets to others who may not be as focused on the delivery of affordable housing. ***It is important that Ontario receives a fair share of funding based on population and need.*** To solve the growing housing affordability crisis in Canada, Ontario and in local communities, all governments must work together. OMSSA members look forward to further engaging with CMHC and working closely with our provincial and federal partners to address challenges related to housing and homelessness.

### **Early Years and Child Care:**

In Ontario, Service System Managers play a central role in the planning, funding, administration and operation of early years and licensed child care services. ***OMSSA and its members strongly support Ontario signing on to a national child care deal with the Government of Canada.*** ([Please see our previous letter sent to the Ministry of Education on November 17, 2021](#)).

OMSSA and its members play an important role in implementing any potential deal and should have a voice at the table. We look forward to working with our provincial and federal partners to design and implement a fair deal that promotes increased affordability, allows for recruiting and retaining RECEs, promotes quality through the licensed system, expands capacity and assists with economic recovery and labour force participation in communities across Ontario. OMSSA hopes the outstanding issues related to this deal can be sorted out as soon as possible.

Early years and child care is crucial to addressing inflationary cost of living concerns, economic recovery and the “shecession” that has disproportionately impacted women during the pandemic. Canada’s largest province with some of the highest fees in the country cannot afford to wait much longer for a deal to be signed. Families are expecting a deal and expect all three levels of government to work together and make this happen.

### **Social Assistance and Employment:**

In Ontario, Service System Managers play a central role in the planning, funding, administration, and delivery of income support (Ontario Works), stabilization services, and employment services.

OMSSA and its members are ready to build on our relationships and work in partnership with the provincial and federal governments to lend our expertise and experience towards integrated human service delivery and improved outcomes in stabilization services, employment, income security and poverty reduction.

Throughout the pandemic, the federal government provided social assistance through the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Relief Benefit (CRB) that were



more generous than those received from Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. A new benefit of \$300 has been introduced to support Canadians living in an area where a lockdown condition exists. There is also an ongoing review related to Employment Insurance based on lessons learned from the pandemic response.

These programs provided crucial emergency support but also highlight the low social assistance rates at the provincial level. The pandemic is still ongoing and the most vulnerable still require emergency supports if they have lost their jobs or business due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions and lockdowns.

As federal benefits expire, Ontario's Service Managers are expecting caseloads to surge. Our members are also seeing unexpected issues resulting from the expiry of benefits such as seniors facing claw backs related to the Guaranteed Income Supplement Program.

The Canada Revenue Agency is currently attempting to collect benefits that may have been collected in error. There are also ongoing efforts to recover Ontario Works benefits from those who failed to report income received from federal programs. Efforts should be made to mediate these hardships. Those who made legitimate errors may face increased poverty resulting from these collection efforts. As federal benefits expire, consideration must be given to unintended consequences with attempts to correct these issues as quickly as possible.

There has been discussion around a universal basic income at the national and provincial level. Should this be considered, it would make sense to have all levels of government collaborate to incorporate all income support programs into a single basic income program.

It is also important to remember that crucial stabilization services and wrap around supports remain vital to recipients in addition to an overall increase in financial supports. Increased social assistance rates can help lift people out of poverty but many also need the crucial stabilization supports that OMSSA members currently provide to Ontario Works clients.

There is a trend that government services are now better utilizing technology and moving towards digitization. The CERB centralized intake for example was efficient and got money to those in need quickly. As we move further towards digitization and modernization of services, it is important to remember that not everyone in Canada has access to high-speed internet or cell phone services. These services are now as crucial as traditional utilities.

We also need to ensure services are offered in multiple languages and that technological literacy exists among all populations served. ***OMSSA encourages the federal government to continue investing in broadband to ensure all communities can be part of the digital economy and have access to crucial human services offered by all levels of government.***

## Health and Long-Term Care:

Although health and long-term care are provincial responsibilities, the federal government



has a role to play overseeing the *Canada Health Act* and providing provincial transfers to help fund health care costs.

In the most recent election campaign, promises were made to increase health transfers to the provinces to help support rising health care costs and to create national long-term care standards. This is especially urgent during a global pandemic and also as Canada's population ages.

***All provinces have called for an increase in federal health transfers to the provinces and increased funding to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 in long-term care settings. OMSSA supports these requests from the provincial government to the federal government.***

The ongoing pandemic has presented capacity challenges in our hospital system, long-term care facilities, and with frontline healthcare workers. Communities across Ontario and Canada continue to face an opioid crisis, and COVID restrictions have taken a negative toll on the mental health of municipal frontline workers and residents.

***A national mental health and addictions strategy is needed*** to address this growing crisis and ensure those in need get the services they require close to home. ***A national opioid strategy would also be welcome to address this particular crisis*** that is costing people their lives in all Canadian communities.

## **Emergency Social Services and Climate Change:**

CMSMs and DSSABs provide emergency social services. Emergencies such as forest fires, floods, heat waves, blizzards, tornadoes, and other natural disasters resulting from climate change are becoming more frequent.

Municipalities are on the frontlines of climate change and require funding to retrofit buildings, adapt to climate change through mitigation efforts, and cover the cost of increasing climate events that result in the need for more emergency social services.

Climate change is a global issue. To make progress on Canada's emission reduction commitments and net zero emission targets, all levels of government must work together on finding solutions and taking collective action now.

## **Newcomers and Refugee Support:**

Canada is a country built on immigration and has a history of showing compassion towards refugee settlement. Large urban municipalities and communities near border crossings in Ontario have seen migration and resulting pressure on the shelter system, homelessness services and community housing systems.

The ongoing pandemic, social distancing and increased capacity challenges add further to those challenges. **OMSSA and its members request additional federal support to help settle refugees** into the community and to ensure appropriate human services are available to support the most vulnerable.

OMSSA members also provide supports for newcomers to Canada. **Increased efforts should be made to provide services in multiple languages, speed up foreign credential recognition and provide appropriate supports for new immigrants settling into Canada.** Efforts should also be made to include a municipal voice to recruit immigrants to local communities facing labour shortages and to increase economic development.

Canada has two official languages. Many additional languages are spoken within Ontario. Support to offer services in multiple languages including French and Indigenous languages is important. Services should be inclusive and maximum efforts should be made to promote awareness of human services available locally and navigation through a complex system.

### Truth and Reconciliation and Inclusion:

OMSSA and its members are committed to our collective Truth and Reconciliation responsibilities. We believe our members and the human services sectors have a key role to play in Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities across Ontario. **OMSSA also believes that, where possible, services targeted to Indigenous communities should be delivered by Indigenous organizations.**

It is also important to be aware of systematic racism and unconscious bias. An equity lens and inclusive approach should be factored into policy development, program design and delivery of services.

### Partnership between Municipalities, the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada:

Every level of government has worked together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar collaboration will also be required to ensure economic recovery and to support health and human services systems once the pandemic is over.

Municipalities are facing fiscal challenges and can only raise money through property tax increases and user fees. Our members cannot run deficits and cannot afford any downloading from other levels of government. The scope of services has increased over time and the pandemic is putting pressure on municipal budgets as provincial and federal governments attempt to reduce spending and deficits.

Municipalities are also feeling the impact of inflation. Property tax increases put pressure on seniors and those on fixed incomes. Increasing user fees and transit fares can be a barrier to



accessing community services. ***To support residents through the pandemic, continued support is needed from both the provincial and federal levels of government.***

OMSSA supports submissions from other municipal associations including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the individual cities, regions, counties and DSSABs that make up OMSSA's membership. We wish the Minister and Department of Finance officials all the best as they develop the 2022 Federal Budget.

Sincerely,

**Cathy Cousins**  
President,  
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

**Doug Ball**  
Executive Director  
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association