



February 11, 2022

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
Frost Building, 7th Floor
7 Queen's Park Cres.
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Y7

Sent by email to: submissions@ontario.ca

Re: OMSSA 2022 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

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 Ontario 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.

OMSSA appreciates the relationship and consultations that have taken place with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) on several initiatives including the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF), Community Housing Renewal, the Supportive Housing Review, the Housing Supply Action Plan, Homelessness Enumeration, and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the community housing and shelter systems.

OMSSA members appreciate the significant investment that has gone into the SSRF. This program has been essential to responding to the pandemic and keeping the most vulnerable safe from COVID-19. The program is set to expire in March 2022 and municipalities are concerned about winding this program down. The SSRF has provided additional capacity, generated positive outcomes, and has funded important local projects and initiatives in communities across Ontario that were needed even before the pandemic. The extensive funding deficit that already existed in the system was greatly exacerbated and amplified by the pandemic and **OMSSA urgently requests this program be permanently extended**



beyond March 2022. Long-term, sustainable operating funding also needs to accompany capital funding to ensure positive outcomes over the longer term. All levels of government also need to work together to reduce or eliminate homelessness in all communities within Ontario.

Service Managers also appreciate the flexibility, innovation and crucial outcomes allowed by the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) program. **Consideration should be given to extending the SSRF and rolling it into a permanent enhanced CHPI** over the longer-term to ensure sustainable results on homelessness supports into the future. The CHPI funding formula should also be reviewed to ensure equity and that the needs of all Ontario communities are being adequately met.

Enumeration efforts have shown that homelessness is increasing across Ontario. Many municipalities are dealing with homelessness encampments as capacity is stretched in the shelter and community housing systems due to increasing demand and the need for social distancing. A housing first approach is required to achieve stability supports goals and ensure that no Ontarian is left behind. **Continued support with personal protection equipment (PPE) is also required** to support both staff and clients within the community housing and shelter system.

Our members have also worked closely with MMAH through provincial-municipal tables on the Community Housing Renewal initiative. **Municipalities welcome changes that would lead to municipally funded programs being recognized under service level standards.** An inventory of these programs should be collected and submitted to MMAH for consideration under service level standards. Clear standards should be set to provide service managers with guidance on what would be required in locally funded municipal programs that would count towards service level standards.

OMSSA would also like to see **the *Housing Services Act* funding formula phased out at End of Mortgage (EOM) and service managers given full flexibility to negotiate new funding agreements with providers to meet local needs.** OMSSA members support, value and have strong partnerships with non-profit and co-op housing providers and share the goal of maintaining units in good repair and ensuring viability into the future. The goal of all stakeholders should be to keep vital public assets in the system. **Funding from the federal and provincial governments is needed to address the backlog of repairs within the community housing system, increase capacity, address growing waitlists** in the province of Ontario and ensure sustainability.

OMSSA supports rent-gear-to-income simplification and flexibility around local rules to ensure quick access is possible for those most in need of community housing. Local rules should be made at the local level to encourage flexibility, enhance innovation, and provide Ontario's service system managers with ability to address unique local challenges across the province.

OMSSA also supports the province in demanding a “fair share” from the federal government by including all 47 Service Managers into the Reaching Home program. Currently, only 25 out of 47 are eligible for this funding. Service Managers support the province working closely with the federal government on the National Housing Strategy, Rapid Housing Initiative and ensuring that housing and homelessness remain a top priority as part of intergovernmental negotiations. Capital and operational funding is needed to support housing and homelessness initiatives at the local level of government. The federal Safe Restart Agreement was crucial in helping municipalities support residents through the pandemic and helped fund the SSRF. Another round of funding is required to support local governments through the current phase of the COVID-19 response.

Concerns around housing supply and rental costs are top priorities for Canadians and Ontarians. Many have been priced out of home ownership. Affordable housing is a challenge not just in the Golden Horseshoe Area, but also in other urban, suburban, rural, and Northern communities across Ontario as residents migrate from the GTHA to these communities seeking housing. Tight vacancy rates and a lack of new supply have also led to surging rental costs everywhere in Ontario. There is a particular need to address student and seniors housing in some communities and also a need to increase overall rental supply. **Extending the Strong Communities Rent Supplement program that expires in March 2023 and enhancing portable housing benefits to reflect true market costs, is needed** to increase capacity and meet the demand for rental housing within all Ontario communities.

To improve health outcomes and help prepare for employment, close integration is required between health and human services. Ontario is currently consulting with municipalities and partners on a supportive housing review. Transitional and supportive housing is needed in all communities. Warming centres have proven to be important during the winter months and support is needed to operate these centres locally. Many service managers have found success with mobility supports to reach homeless populations where they are and encourage trust building and a proactive approach to homelessness services. A housing first approach is crucial to stability support outcomes but wrap-around supports are also needed to reach intended objectives. **Long-term sustainable funding is needed to maintain a stable supportive housing system.** When there are shortfalls, the burden falls squarely on the shoulders of the municipal housing departments and puts further pressure on municipal budgets and property taxpayers.

Increased investments in mental health and addictions services are an especially high priority. These services were in high demand prior to the pandemic but demand has only increased. 25% of Canadians reported they were in need of mental health services but could not access services¹. The opioid crisis along with substance abuse have increased because of COVID-19 restrictions and social isolation. **A provincial and national strategy is needed on mental health to support access to services in all municipalities.** Long-term

¹ The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/anxiety-depression-loneliness-study-1.6327708>



sustainable funding for health supports is critical to the success of housing and homelessness programs.

Housing and homelessness require the federal, provincial, and municipal governments to work together. Ontario's 47 Service System Managers look forward to continuing to work together with our provincial and federal partners as we address ongoing challenges during the pandemic and work towards recovery once it is over.

Early Years and Child Care:

In Ontario, Service System Managers play a central role in the planning, funding, administration and operation of licensed early years and child care services. OMSSA appreciates the relationship with the Ministry of Education, and the consultations that have taken place through the provincial-municipal technical table on reviewing the funding formula, workforce retention, emergency child care, capacity building and to ensure access, quality, inclusivity and choice are part of any sustainable early years and child care system.

The Omicron variant and ongoing pandemic continues to present challenges to the delivery of children's services. All efforts must be made to ensure early years and child care services are delivered in the safest manner possible. **The province must also secure additional N95 masks, antigen testing and PPE to protect early years and child care staff and children from COVID-19.**

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 are ready to work in partnership with the province to lend our expertise and experience on designing and implementing early years and child care policy within Ontario. The province should utilize the strength of knowledgeable service system managers to develop a plan that meets the unique needs of Ontario once an agreement is reached. Collaboration, transparency and flexibility are key when the time comes for implementation. We also look forward to co-designing and implementing a potential deal that promotes increased affordability, allows for the recruiting and retaining of Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs), promotes quality through the licensed system, expands capacity and assists with economic recovery and labour force participation.

RECEs promote early learning and quality within the child care system. Many have been forced to leave the sector as wages have not kept up with the cost of living and inflation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, RECEs stepped up to provide emergency child care for health and frontline workers. They did not receive pandemic pay and took risks to provide this crucial service. Our members are reporting a growing shortage of RECEs across the province. RECEs are under compensated for their important work and this is causing a retention and recruitment crisis in communities across Ontario. **As part of any national child care deal, a wage grid is needed to increase wages to reflect the valuable work RECEs do within the early years and child care system. We ask the province to collaborate**

with the College of ECEs and our members to design a provincial recruitment and retention strategy to address this issue. Many RECEs were forced to collect the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and operators had to rely on wage and rent subsidies due to forced closures during the pandemic. Employees are leaving the sector because they are able to get better wages and working conditions as is the case in all sectors within the 'care economy'. Support is needed for the recovery of the sector and ensure no spaces are lost within the system.

To meet expected demand for the proposed \$10-a-day national child care program, additional capacity is needed to ensure parents have access and can find a child care space within the system. The provincial and federal government should also factor in that many cannot afford \$10-a-day child care and currently pay less through fee subsidies. These fee subsidies must be expanded to reduce poverty and prioritized for those with the lowest income. The goals of \$10-a-day child care and affordability cannot be the only objective within the national child care deal. Emphasis must also be placed on quality and supporting the licensed system.

Efforts must be made to improve relations with school boards to ensure EarlyON centres and parents with children in the early years and child care sector have access to schools. The former “school’s first policy” required EarlyON and child care centres to operate out of publicly funded institutions. Over time, some local school boards recognized that rent charges to operators is a form of double dipping and have waived rent fees. **This practice of waiving rent fees should be mandated across the province to increase the affordability** of children services programming in Ontario.

OMSSA feels strongly about the need to provide inclusive child care. This includes Indigenous child care programs and special needs resourcing. **OMSSA believes that, where possible, Indigenous child care should be delivered by and directly funded to Indigenous organizations.**

OMSSA also requests **the province reconsider cost sharing and cuts to administration that are putting pressure on municipal budgets in 2022 and beyond.** OMSSA members are excited about the potential historic investment into the early years and child care sector. We appreciate the federal and provincial goal to expand capacity and improve affordability for parents. Downloading of child care costs should not be occurring at the same time as municipalities deal with increased budget pressures. Municipalities only receive nine cents on every dollar of tax revenue in Canada² and many residents (especially seniors on fixed incomes) cannot afford to stay in their homes if there are major increases in property taxes.

Our members take their Service System management role seriously and believe strongly in flexibility to meet local needs within municipalities in all parts of Ontario. We stand ready to

² Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) <https://www.amo.on.ca/advocacy/strategic-priorities/local-share>



continue consultations and work closely with our provincial partners to further enhance the early years and child care system in Ontario over the coming months and years.

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) 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 stability supports, employment, income security and poverty reduction.

OMSSA appreciates our close relationship with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and consultations that have occurred on social assistance renewal, employment system transformation (EST), poverty reduction and human services integration through the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee and Provincial-Municipal Human Services Collaborative tables. **Our members support social assistance renewal and the co-design process that has occurred between MCCSS and municipalities.** Members also appreciate the consultation on Ontario's poverty reduction strategy and efforts to support victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. Centralized intake, improved technology and risk-based decision making has the potential to be positive for clients of Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). At the same time, **members are concerned about program delivery funding that has been frozen since 2018.** Members are facing pressures with increased caseloads as federal benefits expire, new collective bargaining agreements require negotiation, and employment dollars have to be transferred to new Employment Ontario System Service Managers as part of EST. CMSMs and DSSABs appreciate the opportunity to consult on the new funding and accountability agreement for municipalities as part of Social Assistance Renewal.

As the cost of living continues to rise, we face a reality that **OW and ODSP rates must increase to keep up with inflation. Rent and utility scales must also be reviewed and increased to address current costs.** Federal benefits offered during the pandemic were far higher than those offered by ODSP and OW. The federal government has acknowledged that that \$2000 per month is what people require to avoid poverty and meet basic needs. At current OW and ODSB rates, many are forced to live well below the poverty line and will not be able to meet their basic needs. OMSSA supports Social Assistance Renewal, but it will be difficult to reach desired outcomes without addressing this core issue. Ontario's Service System Managers hope to continue to further build on this work over the coming years.

Stability supports are needed to assist OW and ODSP clients who face barriers to employment. This role will be the responsibility of our members as part of Social Assistance (SA) Renewal. To fulfill this role, **investments are needed to address the social determinants of health and to help support clients with barriers prepare for**



employment. This includes mental health and addiction services, supportive and transitional housing, early years and child care, employment services, food security, transportation and flexible discretionary benefits to support medical services such as dental, eye care and prescription drugs. Flexibility should be maintained with regards to discretionary benefits to promote innovation, meet unique local needs and to prioritize supports where they are most needed. Additionally and of critical importance in the renewed system, and the services and benefits it enables, must better address the needs of disabled Ontarians. While OMSSA members are encouraged by the ability to serve some ODSP clients directly in the new model for social assistance, the province must account for this additional responsibility in its funding and accountability framework to ensure the appropriate types of supports can be provided and sustained.

OMSSA and its members believe in human services integration and a client centric approach to human services delivery. It is important that current initiatives are evaluated to ensure they are fulfilling desired outcomes and objectives before they are expanded. **OMSSA encourages the province to review the EST prototype areas to determine if they are resulting in improved client service and employment outcomes.** SA renewal initiatives that separate functional responsibilities for centralized intake, financial administration, stabilization services and employment run the risk of creating a system where clients will feel lost and find it more difficult to navigate services. It is also important to consider the ongoing global pandemic and economic situation in advancing renewal initiatives and in establishing realistic employment and service delivery targets.

OMSSA encourages Ontario to fully support non-profits, charities, and foodbanks doing crucial work within Ontario communities. The charitable and non-profit sector fulfills important gaps in human services, but many have faced fundraising challenges and increased demand resulting from the pandemic. Addressing social assistance rates is crucial to allow people to afford daily living. Less reliance on temporary measures such as charities and food banks will create a system that is perpetually underfunded should not be a long-term goal.

Continued investments in broadband is also required as the province moves forward with digitization and technology. Many OW clients do not have access to high-speed internet, cell phone service or services in their first language. In some cases, individuals are not able to attend Social Benefit Tribunal or Landlord Tenant Board hearings due to barriers around technology. Libraries and municipal facilities may be able to support clients accessing technology within Ontario communities. Investments in training and technological literacy are also needed to ensure this transition to digital services is successful. For many, the cost to access technology is too high for people to afford. As the government shifts to involve further online services people need to be provided with funding (including a financial benefit for technology) as part of a Digital Access Strategy.

OMSSA looks forward to continuing to build on an already strong relationship with MCCSS to modernize the social services system within Ontario and achieve the best possible stability supports and employment outcomes for Ontario's most vulnerable residents. OMSSA

members hope to continue to co-develop, co-iterate, evaluate and monitor and be willing to adjust over the years to ensure we are finding better outcomes for residents

Community Safety and Well-Being:

Municipalities were mandated to submit a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan to the Ministry of the Solicitor General in 2021 with no provincial support. These plans assisted with overall health and human services planning and involved extensive consultations within the communities covered by these plans. The Community Safety and Wellbeing plans are required to be renewed every five years. To maximize outcomes, support with implementation is required. **OMSSA requests that the province support municipalities with direct financial support to hire staff to implement the plans, continue engagement with all community stakeholders, assist with reporting outcomes, create and support situation tables, and promote health and human services integration.**

It is also important to have policing services, Ontario Health Teams and corrections facilities participate to fully integrate justice, health, and human services, and ensure vulnerable populations can navigate the system and receive needed supports.

Community Safety and Well-Being plans have the potential to be great planning tools and could also reduce overall municipal reporting and administrative burdens by eliminating duplicate administration, planning, and reporting requirements. These plans are endorsed by elected municipal Councils and municipalities are accountable to residents in achieving desired outcomes outlined in the plans.

OMSSA hopes to further build on our relationship with the Ministry of the Solicitor General to move forward on integrating justice, health, and human services integration within the province.

Public Health, Ontario Health Teams, Paramedics and Long-Term Care:

It is obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic is not over. Long-term planning is needed, as opposed to a reactionary approach.

OMSSA members continue providing support to shelters, community housing, emergency child care, and long-term care all while dealing with a surge in social assistance applications.

The pandemic has delayed economic recovery and pandemic restrictions have been a challenge to achieving stability supports and employment outcomes. We are facing an ongoing opioid crisis, a mental health crisis, and a social isolation crisis. All Ontario residents are impacted by this, but seniors are at particular risk to social isolation and the need for supportive services. Municipalities need to have a voice in the decisions about mental health and addictions funding to meet local needs, collaborate with providers and ensure accountability. A flexible 24/7 model and coordination is needed at the local level.

This is not the time to dial back supports. Municipal budgets are stretched to the limit and residents across the province require ongoing financial resources from provincial and federal partners so that we can get through this pandemic together and move on to recovery.

The pandemic has also exposed challenges that need to be addressed:

- Previously, legislative changes were proposed that would reduce public health units in Ontario to consolidate. The value of local public health has increased. **OMSSA believes the province should reconsider or delay changes to the public health system proposed in 2019.**
- Dispatch for paramedics needs to be improved and many paramedics are dealing with burnout and mental health issues. Continuing delays in offloading ambulance patients at emergency departments requires immediate resolution to reduce the negative impact on paramedic availability in communities. Paramedics are a specialty resource spending up to half of their staffing hours in hospital. Immediate triage and transfer of care from paramedics to hospital staff is required to make paramedics available to respond to 911 calls in the community. Paramedics are the only resource capable of responding to medical emergency calls in the community and they can no longer contribute to staffing in the emergency departments. **In response to a growing and aging population, alternate patient destinations for paramedics should be considered to relieve healthcare capacity pressures, in addition to expanded investment in EMS dispatch infrastructure and paramedic mental health resources.**
- There is a shortage of Personal Support Workers (PSWs) who are undercompensated and as a result difficult to recruit and retain. PSWs are essential to providing long-term care support and home care. **Similar to RECEs, a provincial PSW recruitment and retention strategy is required to support long-term care, home care and the developmental sector.**
- OMSSA would like to acknowledge the extraordinary provincial investment in long-term care during the pandemic with the current and planned increase in funding towards guaranteeing a minimum of four hours of care. This funding is appreciated and will make a difference for clients in long-term care facilities. **OMSSA also requests the province to review the long-term care funding formula to ensure all costs are covered to maintain well-run, safe and high-quality facilities without relying on municipal funding. Funding support for long-term care home redevelopment is also needed.** The current formula leaves operators to upfront the funding, resulting in many operators leaving the sector. There is an increasing need for LTC services, placing added pressure on municipalities to fill the void. Ongoing support is needed for municipally funded long-term care facilities to help protect the most vulnerable from the pandemic and address challenges that are arising from an aging population.

- Mental health and addictions support is needed for municipal employees and residents in all communities across Ontario. Funding should be allocated to support those who have been on the frontline of the pandemic from the provincial mental health strategy.
- Ontario's 47 Service Managers support the work of Ontario Health Teams (OHTs), and it is important to ensure a municipal voice is at the table to maximize efforts towards collaboration between health, human services, and supports offered within local municipalities. **All 47 service system managers should have an OHT within their community.** While some OHTs are under development there are some areas, such as Northeastern Ontario, where a gap in service exists. OMSSA has been working closely with Ontario Health on Health Care System Navigation and integrating health and human services while improving relationships, integration, planning and collaboration between municipalities and OHTs.
- OMSSA and its members appreciate the Provincial-Municipal Human Services Collaborative table as we move forward with health and human services integration. It is crucial to ensure that the Ministry of Health and Ministry Long-Term Care are fully represented at that table and that work continues integrating health and human services across Ontario.
- **OMSSA also supports the need to increase federal health transfers to the provinces** in order to support hospitals and the health and long-term care sector as a whole.

Emergency Social Services:

OMSSA's members 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. **Increased provincial support to assist municipalities with planning for emergencies** would be appreciated.

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 crisis, and all governments have a role to play in reducing carbon emissions and preparing for the adverse impacts resulting from climate change such as the recent flooding in British Columbia and forest fires in Northern Ontario.

Human Services Integration, System Navigation and Administrative Burdens:



OMSSA supports a vision where there are fewer silos between provincial Ministries and increased integration between human services at the municipal level. Human Services Integration has been a priority for the Association for over a decade now.

OMSSA has enjoyed a close relationship with the Ontario Office of Human Services Integration and has also provided consultation to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy.

We would like to see greater collaboration between provincial Ministries including the MCCSS, MMAH, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long-Term Care, Associate Ministry of Mental Health; Ministry of the Solicitor General; Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and others associated with justice, health and human services.

OMSSA supports ongoing work with MMAH and other partner Ministries to reduce administrative and reporting burdens on municipalities. OMSSA members want to spend more time focused on providing support to clients and less time on unnecessary, duplicate, and time-consuming administrative and reporting requirements. **OMSSA requests the province to share their data collected from municipalities to assist in planning and decision-making at the local level.**

System navigation is important to ensure that vulnerable individuals find the services they need. For this reason, we are working very closely with Ontario 211, Ontario Health, and Feed Ontario to help people navigation through human services and health services offered in all communities.

OMSSA also supports the planning, development and establishment of additional Community Hubs. It makes sense to offer multiple services in a single location so that they are easily accessible, efficient and that clients are not lost in the system due to a lack of transportation or having to tell their story multiple times.

We look forward to continuing to work towards health and human services integration at the local level and on consulting with the province to further this initiative through co-design and collaboration.

Partnership between Municipalities and the Province of Ontario:

OMSSA and its members appreciate the partnership and consultation that has occurred over the last four years in the areas outlined earlier in this letter. **OMSSA and its members are committed to our collective Truth and Reconciliation responsibilities and believe that all services should be inclusive are offered through an equity lens.** These proposals and health and human services need to be examined through the many lenses that make up Ontario communities including Indigenous, gendered, age, racialized, LGBTQ2S+ and newcomer populations.

Ontario's 47 Service Managers continue to contribute technical expertise, engagement, and providing feedback at many provincial-municipal technical tables. We look forward to building



on this relationship and working in partnership as we navigate the pandemic response and work towards recovery.

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. The scope of services has increased over time and the pandemic is putting pressure on municipal budgets. **To support residents through the pandemic, continued support is needed from the provincial and federal levels of government.**

OMSSA also supports submissions from other municipal associations including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the individual cities, regions, counties and DSSABs that make up our membership. We wish the Minister and Ministry of Finance officials all the best as they develop the 2022-23 Ontario budget.

Sincerely,

Cathy Cousins
President,
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

Doug Ball
Executive Director
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association