



## MENTAL HEALTH



Just like physical health, mental health and well-being are influenced by the social, economic, and physical environments in which people work, live, and play. Populations with socio-economic disadvantages are disproportionately affected by mental health problems and challenges. **There is no health without mental health.**

Mental well-being is a concern with an increasing percentage of Ontarians who report their mental health as fair or poor, and who have experienced mental health challenges or illnesses, especially since the pandemic began. Almost half of Ontarians believe that COVID-19 played a major role in worsening of their mental health.<sup>i</sup>

### Key Actions

- Promote infant, child and youth mental health through public health programming including school health, healthy families, and healthy communities while increasing access to services and decreasing wait times.
- Support strategies that target the social determinants of mental health across the lifespan of individuals, with a focus on reducing stigma and increasing inclusion and support.

## INCOME SECURITY



Food insecurity occurs as result of not having enough money to buy food and other necessities. It affects about 13% of households in Ontario.<sup>ii</sup> Current unprecedented levels of inflation will make household food insecurity worse.<sup>iii</sup>

The risk of food insecurity varies by different household characteristics. Food insecurity is most prevalent among households with low incomes, female single-parent families, those who rent rather than own their housing, and those who identify as Indigenous or Black.<sup>iv</sup>

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem. Adults in food insecure households are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and anxiety. Children in these households are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and teenagers are at greater risk of depression, social anxiety, and suicide. Food insecurity costs the healthcare system as adults living in food insecure households have much higher healthcare costs compared to those living in food secure households.<sup>v</sup>

**The solution to food insecurity is income security.**

### Key Actions

- Implement policy interventions that reduce income inequalities, such as a basic income guarantee, a living wage, and social assistance rates that are geared to the cost of living so that everyone has the money they need for basic needs, including food.

## PAID SICK DAYS



Inequitable access to paid sick days in Canada has significant impacts on income and health. Paid sick leave provisions are essential to protect the health of individual workers, their workplaces, and the broader community. This has become even more evident with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>vi</sup>

In Canada, 58% of all workers and over 70% of workers earning less than \$25,000 do not have access to paid sick days. As a result, these workers must choose between losing income or going to

work while sick. A paid sick day policy is essential to protect individuals, workplaces, and community health. Women, low wage and precarious workers, and racialized communities are most impacted by a lack of paid sick days.<sup>vii</sup>

The Government of Ontario's paid sick-leave program provides three paid sick days to employees and has recently been extended to July 31, 2022. Evidence indicates to be effective, paid sick days must be universal, permanent and provide at least seven paid sick days.<sup>viii</sup>

### Key Actions

- Implement a paid sick day policy that is permanent, universally accessible to all workers, is paid at 100% of a worker's wages, and provides at least seven paid sick days.

## HOUSING



Safe, affordable, quality housing is important for health, wellbeing, and inclusion.<sup>ix</sup>

Affordable housing means having enough money after paying for housing to spend on other necessities like healthy food, transportation, childcare, and other basic needs.<sup>x</sup>

In 2018, more than 1.6 million Canadian households were spending more than 30% of their before-tax income on housing.<sup>xi</sup>

### Key Actions

- Develop a strategy to ensure affordable, accessible, and supportive housing, including an Indigenous-led housing strategy and housing supports for older adults for all living in THU area.

## INDIGENOUS HEALTH & WELLBEING

Respect First Nation self-governance by ensuring their public health needs, as determined by communities, are met.

Uphold and implement health and well-being responsibilities under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (e.g., honour the treaties with First Nations and uphold governmental responsibilities to each treaty).

### Key Actions

- Ensure sustainable funding, the transfer of necessary resources as well as authority for self-determination and control of public health programming and services across the province to First Nations and Urban/Rural Indigenous communities and organizations.

## ANTI-RACISM



Discrimination is commonly experienced by racialized groups in Canada. Although it may be more common among Black or First Nations people, it is increasing among those who are Chinese or South Asian. Moreover, the trauma of discrimination and racism felt by racialized populations has been intensified by events like the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrations involving acts and symbols of hate, bigotry, racism, antisemitism, and discrimination.

Systemic racism and discrimination have resulted in the unequal distribution of resources, including income, education, employment, housing, and health care, impacting the mental and physical health of racialized populations. Despite an increased awareness of the effects of systemic racism, concrete progress is needed to make Canadian communities more equitable for all.

### Key Actions

- Ensure sustainable funding and commitment to advance provincial anti-racism strategic plan and ensure anti-racism initiatives are informed and led by racialized populations.

- Encourage the creation of inclusive community spaces for all in Northern Ontario.
- To ensure that hate crimes are clearly defined and result in appropriate consequences.

## OPIOIDS



The pandemic has heightened the disparities across communities and has disproportionately affected people who use substances. Many social determinants of health can contribute to an increase in substance use such as poverty, housing problems, occupational issues, trauma and racism, as well as social and physical environments. We continue to hear and see first-hand how the pandemic is affecting all communities, including people who use substances.

Northern Ontario has been particularly impacted by the opioid crisis. In statistics released by the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario, the health units with the 5 highest rates of opioid-related deaths in 2020 were all in Northern Ontario. In total, 338 residents of Northern Ontario died from an opioid-related overdose in 2020, compared to 166 in 2019. This represents an overall rate of death of 42.3 per 100 000 population in northern Ontario as compared with 14.9% for other regions of the province.

### Key Actions

- Support proactive, comprehensive, and multi-stakeholder plans that address substance use, engaging people where they use, and providing necessary education, harm reduction supports, and treatment.

## CLIMATE CHANGE



Investing in local climate action unlocks health and social and environmental rewards. The transportation sector is the leading source of climate emissions, responsible for 35% of Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>xiii</sup>

An efficient public transit system can increase health and social equity, as well as provide environmental benefits. Many people do not drive because of their age, income, ability, or choice. Access to efficient public transit provides an independent way to access jobs and essential services and allows people living on lower incomes to direct more of their earnings to food, clothing, and rent. The effects of public transit are even more impactful when transit vehicles are electric powered and emit no pollutants.<sup>xiv</sup>

Physical activity is a well-known benefit to mental and physical health. Active transportation (replacing car trips with walking or cycling) is an ideal way for busy people to build healthy activity into their lives.<sup>viii</sup>

Neighbourhoods and streets that are more walkable and cycle-safe in their design, benefit people of all ages and income levels.<sup>xv</sup>

### Key Actions

- Invest in public transit and active transportation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase physical activity which will create healthy and green communities.

## ORAL HEALTH



Oral health is an important part of one's overall health and wellness, yet every year an estimated 3 million people in Ontario do not visit a dental office because they simply cannot afford it.

Poor oral health diminishes quality of life at any age and if costs of preventive and acute dental care are prohibitive, measurable deterioration of overall health will follow and, in many cases, leave emergency rooms in Ontario’s hospitals as the only option.

We have a public dental program for eligible children aged 17 and under and a program for eligible seniors living with low-income aged 65 and over. There is a patchwork of inadequate programs for adults on social assistance, but no public oral health program for adults who cannot afford to pay out of pocket for dental care.

### Key Actions

- Ensure publicly funded programs that remove financial barriers to prevention and treatment services for Ontarians of all ages who live on low income before the proposed 2025 timeline.<sup>xvi</sup>

## DIGITAL EQUITY



There is a digital divide in Ontario – some have access to Internet connected devices and services and some do not. This digital divide is affected by many things, including where you live, your income level, and your comfort level in using technology.

Millions in rural and remote areas in Canada have less access to high quality Internet services, and often pay more for lower quality services.<sup>xvii</sup>

Canadian Internet Registration Authority data has shown that median Internet upload speeds for rural users are consistently **10 times slower** that urban speeds, on average.<sup>xviii</sup>

Being unable to access Internet connected devices and services leaves many without access to digitally delivered health and well-being related programs, services and information.<sup>xix,xx,xxi</sup> It also impacts access to education and employment, two powerful and interconnected determinants of health; for example, not having quality Internet services means no online health services, it reduces options for social connection, and it prevents accessing online learning and employment opportunities.

### Key Actions

- Support strategies that fast-track the advancement of digital equity and keep everyone connected through quality, affordable Internet and digital technology and services.

## PUBLIC HEALTH



Public health continues to play a critical role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and we have saved lives by reducing community spread and increasing protection from vaccination. While we remain committed to this important work, we must return our energies to our other responsibilities. This includes, for example, routine vaccination, fostering mental health, and creating safe and supportive spaces where people live, learn, work, and play.<sup>xxii</sup>

In these and other areas, we will re-commit our expertise and resources to promote, prevent and protect the health of our clients and communities. The Association of Local Public Health Agencies’ [Public Health Primer for 2022 Election Candidates](#) draws attention to this topic.

### Key Actions

- Ensure adequate funding and investments to support recovery efforts to reduce the backlog in public health programs and services to meet community needs, including immunization catch-up programs that promote the health of individuals and communities and reduces the burden on health care system.

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