



Survey Response: Canadian Paediatric Society

1. What will your party do to improve access to publicly funded mental health treatment and resources for children and youth living with mental health issues or developmental disabilities?

The last four years have ushered in an era of cuts and chronic underfunding in mental health services. Simply put, the Ontario Liberal Party believes in an entirely different approach when it comes to children's and youth mental health and support for developmental disabilities.

Increasing access to mental health for all Ontarians – including children and youth – is a cornerstone of our platform. We'll train 3,000 new mental health and addictions professionals, social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists. Our mental health strategy has a unique focus on children and youth, and will result in the hiring of 1,000 more mental health professionals for children and make mental health first aid training more available to school staff.

Our proposed \$3-billion mental health strategy over four years will reverse Conservative cuts and expand coverage and reduce wait times for OHIP-covered mental health care for those that need it – including psychotherapy – also providing free 'mental health first aid' and guided online mental health support to everyone.

The Ontario Liberal Party would create an option for all current high school students to register in a Grade 13. This grade will allow students to take new courses that focus on mental health and resilience, while fostering sustainable career pathways to support Ontario's youth at an especially uncertain time in their lives.

When it comes to supporting children with developmental disabilities, an Ontario Liberal government would establish an independent review of autism services to document and learn from past failures, and would shield the Ontario Autism Program budget from funding this study. We'll work as quickly as possible with people with autism, families and clinicians to implement a needs-based Ontario Autism Program for every child that does not discriminate based on age. This will include Applied Behavioural Analysis, occupational therapy, mental health and speech and language pathology. We'll also create new autism therapy capacity across the province and regulate the sector to ensure quality.

We'll work to ensure that families don't pay out of pocket for autism services. We'll implement a direct billing option for therapy, make Special Services at Home funding more flexible and hire at least one new special education professional per school to work with students and help close learning gaps. We'll undertake a comprehensive reform of special education and the needs of students with disabilities – including the Individual Education Plan and autism services in schools – and fix the cliff that occurs when a child with a disability ages into adult services by better aligning both systems.

To help more people with developmental disabilities find homes they love, we'll build at least 2,500 more supportive homes and increase funding support for these homes. We'll provide all adults eligible for the Passport program at least \$6,000 to participate in their communities. We'll enhance funding and address price-gouging through the Assistive Devices Program for things like wheelchairs, hearing aids and lifts.



We will also support youth aged 16 and older and their families through increases to ODSP rates. An Ontario Liberal government would reverse the Ford Conservatives' cuts and increase Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) rates by 10%, followed by another 10% for ODSP recipients in 2023.

2. What will your party do to improve access to paediatric health care in rural and northern communities?

The lack of health care in rural and northern communities is felt across all age groups – but children and youth feel the legacy of this neglect for a lifetime. If elected, an Ontario Liberal government would expand the number of Community Health Centres and Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics in underserved communities so that children have fair and equitable access to primary care. We'll also cover tuition costs for any medical and nursing students in Ontario who commits to working long-term in a rural or remote community – and we'll increase the admission cap on the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, providing more tuition subsidies for students. We'll also annually review the Northern Health Travel Grant to ensure it keeps up with rising costs.

3. What will your party do to reduce rates of childhood poverty and food insecurity across the province?

Nutritious food helps kids learn and focus, and an Ontario Liberal government would work to guarantee that no student goes hungry. We'll provide a free Ontario-grown breakfast for every K-12 student who needs one by expanding the Student Nutrition Program.

But we know that Ontario families need support to get food on the table for their kids. Ontario families are seeing the prices they pay for food increase faster than their wages. This is happening while companies with little or no competition – like banks and mega-grocery retailers – have continued to increase their profits.

While we work to tackle food costs in the long-term – specifically through fairer negotiations between food producers and retailers – we want to immediately help families with the cost of food. Since HST already isn't charged on groceries, we'll target prepared foods – like meals at restaurants or to-go counters – and increase the provincial HST exemption for prepared foods from \$4 to \$20, effective September 1. We'll also increase social assistance rates and introduce a regionally-adjusted living wage.