

Submission to the Ontario Pre-Budget Consultation 2019
Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change
Black Legal Action Centre
Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic
Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change works for racial equity, human dignity and social justice by helping to build community based capacity to address systemic racism, the growing racialization of poverty and the resulting increased levels of social exclusion and marginalization of racialized communities – both First Peoples and peoples of colour – in Ontario.

Ontario's demographics have changed rapidly. 1/3 of the province are now either First Peoples or peoples of colour. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone, it has hit First Nations and peoples of colour much harder in Ontario. We now know that peoples of colour have had poorer health outcomes from COVID-19, higher unemployment rates, deepening poverty, and are facing greater negative impacts in education.

The 2020-2021 provincial budget **must** have particular focus on the greater disparities that have resulted for First Nations and peoples of colour in Ontario, and must work towards improving their life chances by the following measures, with:

- 1) **Racialization of poverty** – the disproportionate disadvantage and systemic discrimination peoples of colour face must be explicitly included in all poverty reduction measures in policy and the budget – including a higher minimum wage, paid sick days, taxation benefits, housing, childcare and more. Statistics reveal that racialized communities are now facing disproportionate levels of unemployment, which is likely to result in the deepening racialization of poverty in Ontario. ***All people in Ontario should be allowed to access social assistance support regardless of immigration status, and social assistance rates must be increased to meet the basic needs on low-income people in Ontario.***

- 2) Establish an **Equity in Employment Secretariat** fully mandated and adequately resourced to implement a mandatory and comprehensive provincial employment equity program in Ontario, to level the playing field for First Peoples, peoples of colour, women, persons with (dis)abilities and LGBTQ community members and work to ensure merit-based employment practices for all across the province.
- 3) **Restore and Enhance Funding for Legal Aid Ontario** – Ontario has Canada’s highest population of low-income peoples of colour. Cuts to Legal Aid Ontario and refugee and immigration legal services have had a significant impact on access to justice for these communities. The lack of sustainable legal aid / legal clinic funding has meant a reduction in the capacity to provide legal services in all areas of poverty law. We can no longer ignore the very real and drastic impact of lack of services on racialized communities
- 4) Appropriate resourcing of the **Anti-Racism Directorate** to provide for the collection and analysis of ethno-racially and otherwise appropriately disaggregated data across all provincial Ministries and public institutions – including the Ministry of Health. Enhance the Directorate’s capacity to engage in ongoing monitoring, analysis and program development in order to implement comprehensive and inclusive equity and anti-racism policies and practices.
- 5) **Education** - The pandemic continues to magnify inequities in educational outcomes, especially in high-density urban areas where low-income, racialized children and youth predominantly reside. Students from these communities continue to face significant barriers to accessing remote learning. Immediately invest in funding and resources to reduce class sizes and support obtaining technological resources and appropriate home environment to facilitate online learning.
- 6) Ontario’s response to the pandemic has demonstrated it can **Extend Universal Health Care** to all people regardless of immigration status and period of residence. Effective March 21, 2020, the Government of Ontario began to cover medically necessary health services for uninsured people who do not meet the criteria for provincial health care coverage and effectively suspended the 3-month residence requirement. The expansion of health care coverage is part of Ontario’s efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring that no one would be discouraged from seeking screening or treatment for financial reasons. These measures should be made permanent so that health care is prioritized as a measure to save costs and

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lives. The province must also redirect health care funds to focus on targeted and culturally tailored approaches to improving health outcomes for First Nations and people of colour, who continue to face poorer health care outcomes in Ontario.

- 7) Women across Ontario are facing disproportionate hardship and escalation in violence against women because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontario must **Increase Funding for Women Services**, including women centres and shelters and language interpretation services, to support women facing multiple issues like unemployment, poverty, housing, access to childcare, unsafe work, and violence.
- 8) Immigrants, refugees and other newcomers accounted for almost 44% of all COVID-19 cases in Ontario despite being only 25% of the population and having lower rates of testing. Immigrant and refugee settlement services are essential to get COVID-19 related and other critical information and supports to newcomers. **Increase funding for Settlement services and Language Training** to support newcomers to withstand the pandemic, and support their settlement and integration.
- 9) **Law Enforcement and Mental Health** - Indigenous communities and peoples of colour continue to be victims of disproportionately high incarcerations. The Government of Ontario must redirect funding from law enforcement budgets to community-based models of safety, support & prevention and public health & mental health services to support Indigenous communities and peoples of colour.