



# Ontario at a Crossroads

## Provincial Election Resource February 2025

*Anglicans Voting to Fulfill Our Call to Care for  
One Another and This Earth*



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada



**ANGLICAN  
DIOCESE OF  
NIAGARA**

# ONTARIO AT A CROSSROADS



A provincial election has been called for Thursday, February 27, 2025. As Ontarians, we have an opportunity to elect leaders who will address the multiple crises before us. As Anglicans, we understand we are called by scripture and our baptismal covenant to care for our neighbours and the Earth.

Participating in elections is one of the ways in which we live out that call. They also give us the opportunity to have conversations about how we can best build up our common life. We have prepared this resource to highlight some of the issues our Dioceses have advocated for at the provincial level in recent years.

Ontario is at a crossroads. We face political and economic uncertainty both at home and around the world. Climate-related disasters are increasing in number and severity. We need Ontario communities to be strong, resilient, and cohesive in the face of these challenges. Yet our communities are already facing deepening crises of affordability, inequality, and opioid toxicity, farmland and ecosystem loss, and a failure to meet even our modest emissions targets.

Will we invest in helping people meet their basic needs in housing, public health, clean energy, healthy farmland, and ecosystems? Or will we leave more and more Ontarians behind, fracturing communities and exacerbating the climate crisis, leaving us more vulnerable to existing and future threats?

## HOW ARE WE CALLED TO PARTICIPATE?

**Learn about the issues.** Much current attention is focused on the potential impact of US tariffs on Ontarians. While this is an important issue, it is not the only one. Issues of poverty, inequality, and environmental health often take a back seat to macro-economic issues like tariffs. Yet failing to address these underlying issues will increase our vulnerability to tariffs and other shocks.

**Pray** that all candidates and voters may be guided by genuine concern for the well-being of all, especially those who are most marginalized and vulnerable in our communities.

**Engage in dialogue:** Use the materials in the [full election resource](#), developed with our neighbours in the Diocese of Toronto, to engage with candidates at your doorstep, on the phone, or through social media. Talk with your neighbours, friends, family, and fellow parishioners about your concerns and how your values are informing your vote.

**Vote:** It has been said, “A winter election is cruel and unusual punishment.” It may seem difficult or unnecessary but don’t let the winter weather allow others to make this important decision for you! Only 44% of eligible voters – a record low turnout – cast ballots in the 2022 provincial election. Visit the [Elections Ontario](#) website to find out how to get on the voters’ list, where and when to cast your ballot, and more. Offer a ride to those who need transportation to the polls. Encourage students 18 and over to vote for the first time. Unhoused Ontarians are also able to vote: use this helpful [infographic](#)<sup>1</sup> to find out more.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Diana Chan McNally for creating this resource



## Safeguarding our Environment and Taking Climate Action

At a time when it is more important than ever to protect local food production, Ontario is already losing 319 acres of farmland every day.<sup>2</sup> Wetlands not only provide essential wildlife habitat, but help clean water, store carbon, and reduce flooding, providing over \$50 billion in annual benefits to southern Ontario alone.<sup>3</sup> Yet, unrestricted urban sprawl and mega-highway projects threaten Ontario's prime agricultural land, wetlands, and other significant natural ecosystems, particularly in Ontario's Greenbelt. This in turn threatens Ontario's food security, water quality, biodiversity, and flood mitigation – all of which are also at increased risk from climate change.

Climate change is already being felt in the increased number and severity of wildfires, flooding, droughts, and heatwaves in Ontario. The Provincial Climate Change Impact Assessment, released in 2023, warns of elevated risks to Ontario's food production, infrastructure, businesses, communities and ecosystems.<sup>4</sup> To reduce these risks we must take robust action to lower our carbon emissions. Yet Ontario's carbon emissions rose from 148.5 megatonnes in 2020 to 157 in 2022, of which the largest contribution by sector (40.9%) was from road transportation.<sup>5</sup> With the fast-tracking of mega-highways like Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, the removal of existing bike lanes, and restrictions on municipalities seeking to create new bike lane infrastructure, it is increasingly unlikely that the province will achieve its carbon emissions target of 144 megatonnes by 2030.

The province's energy production is also moving us father from our climate action goals, with gas-fired power projected to account for 25% of Ontario's electricity supply in 2030, up from 4% in 2017.<sup>6</sup> Investing in renewable energy sources and storage would reduce carbon emissions while being cheaper and cleaner options for Ontario.

### Questions for Candidates:

- **How will you protect Ontario's farmlands, wetlands, and other ecosystems so as to safeguard Ontario's food security, water quality, biodiversity and floodwater management?**
- **Will you cancel the development of the 413 mega-highway and Bradford Bypass and instead invest in expanding and improving public and regional transit?<sup>7</sup>**
- **Will you return decision-making about active transportation infrastructure to municipalities, and reverse plans to remove existing bike lane infrastructure?**
- **Will you significantly expand investment in renewable energy sources instead of ramping up gas-fired power generation?**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ontariofarmlandtrust.ca/about/farmland-loss/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://alus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/estimation-of-ecosystem.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/files/2023-11/mecp-ontario-provincial-climate-change-impact-assessment-en-2023-11-21.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-carbon-emissions-ghg-inventory-1.7191765>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cleanairalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Going-in-the-Wrong-Direction-Report-apr-15-v\\_01.pdf](https://www.cleanairalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Going-in-the-Wrong-Direction-Report-apr-15-v_01.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> 160 Faith Leaders: <https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:de050ca3-8c7c-48b5-aabf-090b1505d30d>



## Decent Work and Income Supports

Over one million Ontarians relied on food banks last year – up 25% from the previous year and 86% since 2019-20, with the number of visits up 134% over 2019-20.<sup>8</sup> Good jobs are – or should be – enough to keep people out of poverty, yet 24% of households accessing food banks in Ontario this past year cite employment as their primary source of income, double the percentage of employed food-bank users before the pandemic<sup>9</sup>.

While the minimum wage, set by the provincial government, benefits from yearly indexation, at \$17.20 an hour it remains \$2.30 to \$8.80 per hour less than living wages calculated in Ontario communities.<sup>10</sup> Living wages for 2025 range from \$19.50 in London/Elgin/Oxford to \$21.30 in Hamilton to \$26.00 in the GTA. To afford the average rent for a currently listed apartment in Ontario, a minimum wage worker would have to work 106 hours a week.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike B.C., Quebec, P.E.I., and the federal government, Ontario does not have paid sick leave for all workers. For low-wage and precariously employed workers, the lack of paid sick leave can all too often lead to financial hardship. Workers must go to work sick or forfeit a day's pay. Going to work sick has negative public health impacts and can also worsen health conditions for the employee, leading to potential medical complications, possible job loss, and a greater burden on our healthcare system.



Both Ontario's social assistance programs, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW,) deliver financial support well beneath the poverty line, trapping recipients in poverty. In particular, OW rates have been frozen since September 2018, during which time the cost of living in Ontario has gone up more than 20%.<sup>12</sup> While the minimum wage and other provincial income support programs have been indexed to inflation, OW rates and earnings thresholds have

remained stagnant, eroding the value of these benefits. The OW rates are so low that a single person cannot afford to rent a bachelor apartment anywhere in Ontario, much less pay for food, clothing, and transportation.

Moreover, the separation between “basic needs” and “housing” benefits means that a social assistance recipient who becomes homeless, loses the “housing” component of the benefit. Instead of supporting people in crisis to rebuild their lives, Ontario's social assistance program

<sup>8</sup> Feed Ontario, Hunger Report 2024 [https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED\\_Ontario\\_HungerReport24.pdf](https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED_Ontario_HungerReport24.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED\\_Ontario\\_HungerReport24.pdf](https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED_Ontario_HungerReport24.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/updated\\_2024\\_living\\_wage\\_rates](https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/updated_2024_living_wage_rates)

<sup>11</sup> [https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED\\_Ontario\\_HungerReport24.pdf](https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED_Ontario_HungerReport24.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://cdhowe.org/publication/brian-lewis-fully-indexing-ontario-social-assistance-long-overdue/>

drives them into deeper poverty, from which it is harder to recover, contributing to rising homelessness, hunger, and demand for social and health services.

#### Questions for Candidates:

- **Would you bring back the Ontario Basic Income Pilot or implement its measures?**
- **How soon will you raise the minimum wage until it approximates the average living wage in Ontario, and thereafter index it to inflation?**
- **Will you support workers by standing up for 10 paid sick days to all Ontario workers?**
- **How will you implement an end to the freeze on OW and ODSP rates? How soon will you make this a priority?**
- **Will you index OW rates and earnings thresholds to inflation?**
- **Will you combine the basic needs and housing components of social assistance into one flat rate?**



## Preventing and Ending Homelessness

Over half a million households in Ontario face affordability challenges, spending more than 30% of their income on shelter. Renters account for 62% of these households.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in Toronto 1 in 5 food bank users spends 100% of their income on housing.<sup>14</sup> Loopholes in Ontario's rent control system, such as the exemption on units built or converted after Nov. 15, 2018, vacancy decontrol, and Above Guideline Rent Increases, result in asking rents increasing at a rate much higher than inflation, and far higher than tenants' incomes. These loopholes give landlords an incentive to displace tenants, as they can charge far more to a new tenant, or even to demolish existing rental housing and build new rental housing that is not subject to rent control. The result is an overall loss of affordable units beyond what is being created, as well as increasing housing precarity among tenant households, as people face an ever-greater risk of homelessness.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-EndingChronicHomelessnessinOntario.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/DB-Whos-Hungry-Report-2024-Digital.pdf>

According to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), an estimated 81,515 Ontarians



experienced “known homelessness” in 2024, a 51% increase since 2016. Chronic homelessness has tripled since 2016, with more than half of people experiencing homelessness in 2024 being chronically homeless.<sup>15</sup> Nor is it enough to build more shelters: despite shelter bed capacity in Ontario increasing by 34% from 2019 to 2014, chronic homelessness has grown by 138%.<sup>16</sup>

Unsurprisingly, unsheltered homelessness has skyrocketed in communities across the province, leading to friction between encampment dwellers, municipalities, and residents who want to use public spaces for recreation. However, without housing options available, unsheltered homelessness will not go away. Indeed, the AMO report warns that without significant intervention, homelessness in Ontario could more than triple in the next decade, particularly under an economic downturn.

Criminalizing people who live in encampments overrides basic human rights and dignity while doing nothing to resolve the underlying issue. Moreover, incarceration is much less cost-effective than housing. The AMO report outlines two scenarios, one for ending chronic homelessness by investing \$11 billion over 10 years, and one calling for a \$2 billion investment over three years to end unsheltered homelessness. These are investments that will not only make our communities safer, but boost economic productivity and foster community cohesion.

#### Questions for Candidates:

- **Will you close residential rent control loopholes by extending rent controls to units built or converted since 2018; ending vacancy decontrol; and limiting Above Guideline Rent Increases?<sup>17</sup>**
- **Will you commit to increased and sustained investments in homelessness prevention and transitional, supportive and rent-geared-to-housing initiatives, such as those outlined in the AMO report, to end chronic and unsheltered homelessness in Ontario?**

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-EndingChronicHomelessnessinOntario.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Reports/2025/2025-01-08-EndingChronicHomelessnessinOntario.pdf>



## Addressing Ontario's Overdose Crisis

The overdose crisis claims the lives of seven Ontarians every day.<sup>18</sup> The death toll would be much worse if not for the heroic work of staff at supervised consumption sites, who have reversed more than 21,000 overdoses between March 2020 and January 2024.<sup>19</sup> However, this government has moved to close 10 supervised consumption sites in the province in the short term and to ban additional or replacement sites from opening. While additional funding for addictions treatment is welcome, the government's proposed HART hub model does not include either safe consumption services or needle exchange. These vital services save lives and promote public health by reducing public needle litter and reducing the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other blood-borne diseases and infections. Far from making communities safer, closing supervised consumption sites will lead to more public drug use, overdose, and death, and put an additional strain on our already burdened emergency health services. Supervised consumption sites, along with enhanced access to addictions treatment, are part of a continuum of care not only for people who use drugs but for the public health and safety of all Ontarians.

### Question for Candidates:

- **Will you reverse the planned closure of Safe Consumption Sites and the ban on new sites, expanding harm reduction, along with enhanced access to addictions treatment, to every community that needs them?**

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To learn more about our Diocesan advocacy on these issues, please contact us!

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<sup>18</sup> Ontario Drug Policy Research Network, <https://odprn.ca/occ-opioid-and-suspect-drug-related-death-data/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://amho.ca/amho-news/addictions-and-mental-health-ontario-calls-for-community-driven-and-evidence-based-approach-to-expanding-addictions-care/>