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## 150 nonprofit leaders urge budget plans addressing poverty

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Toronto: Over 150 nonprofit leaders from organizations working closely with people experiencing poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, mental health and addictions across the GTA came together at a 2023 Budget Forum to develop recommendations to government for the next provincial budget. Their recommendations, released today by Ontario for All, focus squarely on the need for action on three critical fronts affecting our communities: housing, income supports and the crisis now gripping the community services sector.

"The pandemic showed how critical the nonprofit community service sector can be in addressing big challenges," noted Sean Meagher, Coordinator of Ontario for All, the Forum's host. "Most people don't realize that the strain of the pandemic, and ongoing challenges faced by the sector, have stretched community services to the breaking point. Volunteerism is down sharply, recruitment and retention are continued struggles, and funding isn't keeping pace with inflation or demand. The provincial government must work with the sector to develop a concrete plan for how to make sure these critical organizations don't continue to crumble."

"We find ourselves in a critical moment for changing the course of poverty and housing affordability. There is an opportunity to reverse trends and address systemic barriers against marginalized and racialized communities" says Daniele Zanotti, CEO of United Way Greater Toronto. "Non-profit leaders working on the frontline with community have come together to present solutions for both the long- and short-term that will ensure a better life for all Ontarians."

"It is important that government zero in on investing in housing in this budget," said Yvonne Kelly, Co-Chair of the Social Planning Council of York Region, a partner in the Budget Forum. "But we are also losing 20,000 units of existing affordable housing each year in Ontario, which is far faster than we are building it, making affordable housing preservation a key target for 2023 as well too."

"It's hard to imagine how we can get through the current bout of inflation without addressing social assistance," added The Mississauga Food Bank's Christie Lind, a speaker at the Budget Forum. "We've seen food bank use continue to increase, up 24% throughout Ontario last year alone, as prices at the grocery store skyrocket with little movement on social assistance rates. With the Province in the middle of redesigning our social assistance system, it's the right time to engage people on the front lines and develop a realistic plan to address social assistance rates."

The clear, achievable recommendations offered by nonprofit leaders can dramatically improve outcomes for vulnerable Ontarians and meet crucial goals of the provincial government in health and human services. These recommendations are outlined in the budget submission developed by Ontario for All, drawn from the input of nonprofit leaders at the Budget Forum. The submission can be found at [bit.ly/OFA2023BudgetSubmission](https://bit.ly/OFA2023BudgetSubmission) and a more detailed summary of the Forum can be found at [bit.ly/OFA2023BudgetForum](https://bit.ly/OFA2023BudgetForum).

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For further information, please call Sean Meagher at 416 820 7889 or email [info@ontarioforall.ca](mailto:info@ontarioforall.ca)

*Ontario for All is a nonpartisan organization supporting nonprofit leaders in playing active roles shaping evidence-based public policy.*