

HOUSING & HEALTH



From affordable housing investment to job creation strategies, the provincial government makes decisions that have serious implications for the health and well-being of Ontarians. Before you vote on October 6th, choose a candidate that will make the health and well-being of you, your family, and your community a priority. The Wellesley Institute wants to help you better understand some of the top issues in this election. Ask local candidates where they stand on policy issues that affect your health and well-being.

Housing Affects Your Health

A growing body of evidence draws the links between poor housing and poor health. Investing in new homes is more cost-effective than spending on shelters, medical services, policing and jails. A commitment from the government to invest in affordable housing will improve the health and well-being of Ontarians, and won't cost extra money.

Ontario Has A Shortage Of Affordable Housing

It's challenging for many Ontarians to find a good place to call home. One in every three renter households were in core housing need in 2006. As of January 2011, nearly a third of those households were on provincial housing waiting lists—an increase of over 7% in one year. Most low-income households are left to find housing in the private rental housing market. By spring 2011, however, vacancies had fallen to under 3%: so out of a total of 626,000 rental units in the province, only 15,657 had vacancies.

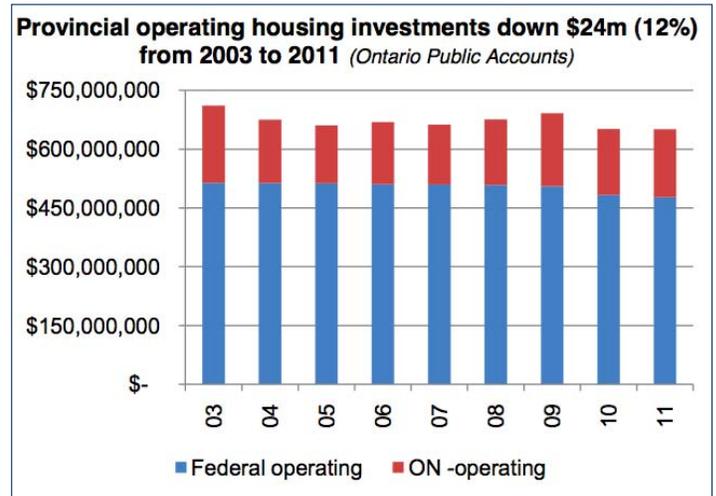
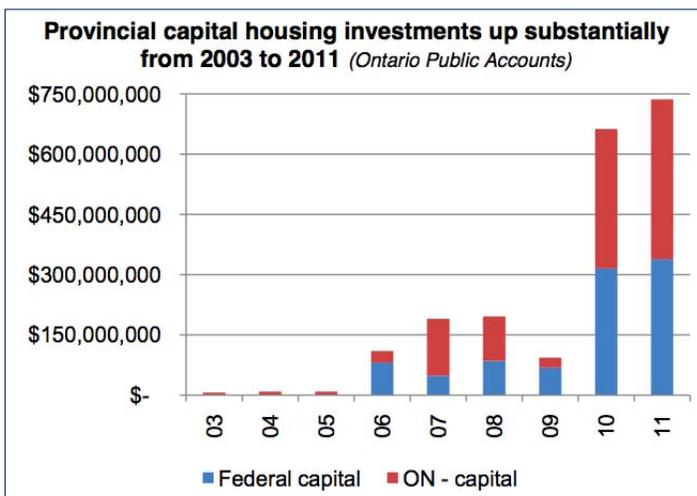
About 1.3 million Ontario households pay 30% or MORE of their income on shelter, which puts their housing into the unaffordable category.

Housing is the biggest expense for most Ontarians and the rising cost of shelter, along with energy, is forcing more and more of us to line up at food banks. Over 402,000 people a month rely on food charity—up a record 28% since the onset of the 2008 recession.

How Affordable Housing Funding Works

Housing spending is divided between capital (buildings) and operating (services). Most housing dollars invested in Ontario start at the federal government, and are passed down through the province to municipalities.

On the capital side, Ontario increased housing investments in 2007 to match new federal dollars and again in 2010 to match federal stimulus funding. In July of 2011, Ontario



signed a three-year housing framework agreement with the federal government and agreed to cost-share some programs. All these initiatives will expire by 2014 leaving provincial capital housing dollars to shrink to zero. As of June 2011, Ontario claims it has developed over 12,000 new affordable homes over the past decade, with another 2,000 under development.

In 2008, Infrastructure Ontario created the innovative Affordable Housing Loan program. The province created a fund of \$500 million and, as of June 2011, \$213 million had been approved for construction and renovation—that means less than half the capital dollars promised had been allocated over three years.

On the operating side, federal housing spending in Ontario was cut by 7% in 2011. Provincial housing spending was cut even more sharply—down 12% from 2003 to 2010. Operating funding flows to existing affordable housing and provides subsidies to keep rents affordable. The federal and provincial withdrawal is expected to accelerate in coming years, putting more pressure on housing providers (including municipalities, non-profits and co-ops).

Provincial Housing Issues

In 2009, the Ontario Auditor-General released a comprehensive review of the province's housing programs and identified a number of critical issues:

- **Ontario has no plan to deal with the increasing withdrawal of federal housing funds. Rents in newly built housing are not affordable to households on waiting lists.**
- **Ontario cannot properly account for hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars.**
- **Recent provincial housing initiatives have been poorly designed.**

WHEN PROVINCIAL ELECTION CANDIDATES ASK FOR YOUR VOTE, ASK THEM:

- **What specific plans—targets, timelines, funding—do you have to move Ontarians living in homeless shelters or on affordable housing waiting lists into healthy and affordable homes?**
- **What are your plans to deal with the increasing withdrawal of federal housing funds, including termination of several key programs in 2014?**
- **How would you change Infrastructure Ontario's innovative affordable housing loan program to ensure more of the funds are allocated in a timely manner?**

- **Ontario has no comprehensive provincial housing plan; no clear targets, timelines and other metrics; and ongoing monitoring of current and new housing initiatives is weak.**

In 2010, the provincial government released its Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy, which set out legislative and program changes. However, the strategy did not include targets, timelines or new funding. There is no specific plan for new homes, repairs to existing substandard housing, vital support services or for measures to address the affordability needs of Ontario households. Where do parties stand on the issues? Ontario needs affordable housing.

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