

# ELECTION ONTARIO 2011

## WORK & 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.*

### Our Work Affects Our Health

Our job can help to keep us healthy or can make us sick, whether it's hazards in the workplace, how much stress we are under, or how much money we earn. A wealth of international data makes the link between jobs, income, health and well-being.

Even before the recession, a growing number of Ontarians were experiencing a deeper level of income and job insecurity than they had in a generation. The gap between the rich and the rest of us got worse, the middle class was feeling squeezed, and Ontario's poor fell further behind. Some have done better than others, but some, such as Aboriginal peoples, racialized Canadians and new immigrants, have been left behind.

A key contributor to this inequality is the labour market. Mid-level jobs have been disappearing and most jobs are now concentrated at the top and bottom of the labour market. Jobs at the bottom end are often temporary, part-time, or self-employment, while the jobs in the middle that were lost were full-time permanent jobs.

A recent report from Statistics Canada shows that life expectancy and health-related quality of life is tied to income level. This doesn't only affect people at the top and bottom of the income spectrum; at all income levels, the more money you make, the longer you live. For example, men in the highest income group have over 14 more years of healthy living and a life expectancy of 7.4 more years than those in the lowest income group.

### Job Quality is Job One

Since the 2008 recession, there has been much discussion of the number of jobs being created, but little attention paid to the quality of those jobs.

The conventional wisdom is that a job is the ticket out of poverty, but in reality, one in three Ontario children living in poverty have families where at least one parent works full-time. Our challenge is to improve the quality of the jobs that already exist in Ontario while also creating the conditions for even better jobs in the future so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy a better quality of life.

Research shows that labour market policies that improve protection for workers, increase bargaining power and contribute to more equitable workforce development can improve population health.

The provincial government has a critical role to play in improving the quality of our working lives. It has the power and responsibility to regulate labour markets, and it has the legislative, policy and program levers to make a difference.

### All Workers Need Better Protection From Employers Who Break the Law

The Employment Standards Act (ESA) is the safety net for most workers in the province. It sets the minimum standards for our work lives: the minimum wages we can expect to earn, the maximum hours we can be forced to work, the number of vacation and sick days we earn and the rules in place when we're fired or we quit.

Unfortunately, this legislation hasn't kept up with changes in the kinds of issues we face in the workplace or the ways in which we work, so that more and more of us aren't protected by the Act. It also needs to be better enforced.

### Racialized Canadians Face Barriers

Census data show a striking difference in income and employment between racialized and non-racialized

Ontarians. Racialized Ontarians are far more likely to live in poverty, to face barriers in Ontario's workplaces, and earn less than the rest of Ontarians.

In 2005, long before the recession, the unemployment rate for racialized workers in Ontario was almost 3 percent higher than the unemployment rate for the rest of Ontarians. Sexism and racial discrimination pack a double wallop, seriously hampering the earnings of racialized women in Ontario. In 2005, racialized women made 53.4 cents for every dollar non-racialized men made. Racialized men in Ontario made 73.6 cents for every dollar that non-racialized men made.

The employment and earnings gap between racialized Ontarians and the rest of the population remains stubbornly high — despite the strong economic performance that Ontario enjoyed when this Census data was collected. It points to an overwhelming need for government to step in with policies to help break down racial and gender barriers in Ontario's labour market.

### The Right To Choose A Union

Historically, unions have provided workers with the opportunity to turn poorly paid, dangerous jobs into good jobs with better pay, hours and benefits. Without the support of a union, workers are on their own when problems arise in the workplace.

Unions contribute to decreases in income inequality. However, changes in the labour market and government policy have made it harder to join a union—especially for the vulnerable workers who need the protection of a union most.

### Wondering what the provincial government can do to improve jobs for people in Ontario?

Visit [www.talkingaboutjobs.ca](http://www.talkingaboutjobs.ca) to see our Six Good Ideas About Jobs and join the discussion!



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

- **What will your party do to protect and help create good jobs for Ontarians—jobs that are secure, full-time and can sustain a family?**
- **What will your party do to update and better enforce the Employment Standards Act so that all workers in the province are protected from employers who break the law?**
- **What will your party do to address the alarming gap in incomes and employment opportunities between racialized and non-racialized Canadians?**
- **How would your party amend the Labour Relations Act to better facilitate a worker's right to organize and join a union?**

\*\*\*\*\*  
For More information contact:

Sheila Block  
Director, Economic Analysis  
[sheila@wellesleyinstitute.com](mailto:sheila@wellesleyinstitute.com)  
416.972.1010 ex. 226

Jo Snyder  
Communications Specialist  
[jo@wellesleyinstitute.com](mailto:jo@wellesleyinstitute.com)  
416.972.1010 ex. 230

