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Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

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Pre-budget consultations

Consultations prébudgétaires

1st Session
44th Parliament

Tuesday 17 November 2026

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Mardi 17 novembre 2026

Chair: Hon. Ernie Hardeman
Clerk: Lesley Flores

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Tuesday 17 November 2026

Mardi 17 novembre 2026

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS
CONSULTATIONS PRÉBUDGÉTAIRES

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs to order. We're meeting today to begin public hearings on the 2027 pre-budget consultations.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed committee documents, including written submissions, to committee members via SharePoint.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until you are recognized by the Chair before speaking, and, as always, all comments should go through the Chair.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we have heard from all three presenters in this one-hour time slot, the remaining 39 minutes will be used for questions from the members of the committee. The time for questions will be divided into two rounds of five minutes and 30 seconds for the government members, two rounds of five minutes and 30 seconds for the official opposition members, two rounds of five minutes and 30 seconds for the recognized third party member and two rounds of three minutes for the independent member of the committee.

I will provide a verbal reminder to notify you when you have one minute left in your presentation or allotted speaking time. I'll also ask the presenters to make sure that they introduce themselves as they start the presentation to make sure we can attribute the comments to the right person. As I said, I will let you know when it's one minute. Don't stop on the one minute because when the one minute is gone, you still stop. That's why we have it in 30 seconds. This is very technical.

ONTARIO REAL ESTATE ASSOCIATION
CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION
ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION—TORONTO SECONDARY UNIT

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Are there any questions from the committee? If not, our first panel this morning is the Ontario Real Estate Association. With that, as you heard the rules, the floor is yours.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee. I'll respect that one-minute deadline.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Diane Brisebois, and I'm the acting CEO of the Ontario Real Estate Association.

Même si mes remarques sont en anglais, ça me ferait plaisir de répondre à vos questions en français si vous le désirez.

OREA is one of the province's largest professional associations, representing nearly 100,000 realtors across the province. OREA's north star has always been to champion housing affordability, modernize the real estate profession and help more Ontarians achieve the dream of home ownership.

This commitment is why over 200 realtor members are gathering today at the Hilton Toronto for OREA's annual political affairs conference, Realtor Advocacy Day, where the central topic is, in fact, addressing housing affordability and unlocking more supply. Tomorrow, over 90 realtors will have the honour to be here at Queen's Park to meet with their MPPs to advance and discuss those recommendations.

The dream of home ownership is very much alive in Ontario, with recent polling showing that 70% of non-homeowners in Ontario want to own a home someday. However, just over half are pessimistic about being able to buy in their municipality.

We commend the government for their leadership in directly reducing new housing costs through reductions in development charges, which are referred to as DCs, and relief on harmonized sales tax. The enhanced new housing rebate provides meaningful relief of up to $130,000 for homeowners on the sidelines, and we're already seeing how much this is helping. New home sales rose by 130% in the first quarter of the rebate program and 61% in the second quarter, according to research for Norman Economic Strategies, the Ontario Home Builders' Association and the Building Industry and Land Development Association.

To build on this progress, OREA recommends extending the enhanced HST rebate period beyond the end date of March 31, 2027. Public opinion research has shown that over 61% of Ontarians support extending the enhanced HST rebate past 2027, and a further 29% want it to be

permanent. An extension will provide builders certainty to plan for future projects and give buyers the confidence to turn their dreams of home ownership into reality.

While the HST rebate supports affordability for homes that get built, an equal challenge is funding the essential infrastructure that makes new neighbourhoods possible. That's why OREA commends the government on its action to reduce development charges, aligning with the recommendations from our policy report titled A Pathway to Development Charge Reform.

OREA has long supported the use of municipal services corporations to allow the upfront cost of water and waste water infrastructure to be harmonized over the long term and not through a buyer's mortgage.

Another key recommendation is to establish a direct-to-buyer billing model for DCs, separating the cost of them from the sales price. This allows the DC amount to be exempt from HST and land-transfer taxes, reducing a tax-on-tax effect and saving buyers thousands of dollars.

Ontario realtors especially commend the provincial and federal government for the Canada-Ontario partnership to build and the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program, which supports municipalities that don't levy DCs. OREA recommends the government continue to look beyond these programs to ensure a sustainable, coordinated approach to infrastructure building that is fair for new home buyers and existing residents.

A final concern that Ontario realtors would like to raise and share with you is about the transformation of the real estate industry itself. OREA has been advocating for modernization since 2009. In 2020, the Trust in Real Estate Services Act was introduced to provide enhanced protection and offer more consumer choice and more transparency. Since then, OREA has been working with the Ministry of Public and Business Services Delivery and Procurement to implement the framework.

OREA recommends that the government of Ontario establish formal mechanisms for direct, ongoing consultation with realtors and experienced professionals, such as establishing a ministry working group. In-depth discussions with those who operate under these rules every day would provide on-the-ground insights on how proposals like administrative penalties or enhanced oversight would work in practice.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: OREA's realtor members, government and the Real Estate Council of Ontario are working towards the same goal: to protect consumers while supporting the real estate profession. We believe it is important to take the time to get the details right and we are prepared to come to the table to assist.

Thank you very much, and I'm pleased to answer your questions at a later time.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

The next presenter will be the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to present to the committee. My name is Michael Anhorn. I'm the CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto branch, and joining me virtually is David Smith, the CEO of CMHA Peel Dufferin. We're here representing the 27 Canadian Mental Health Association branches in Ontario who deliver high-quality mental health care and primary care to people living with mental health and addictions challenges.

I'd like to start my remarks by thanking the government for recognizing the importance of community mental health and their investments in the HART hubs, and most recently in our joint advocacy for the renewal of the federal-provincial bilateral funding agreements. These are really important developments, but the demand continues to grow and the services need to keep pace with the growth and with the increased complexity of our clients.

We need sustained investments to address the sector's long-standing funding challenges. To continue to deliver on our mission around community-based care that many Ontarians rely on, we're requesting a one-time base budget increase of 2.67%.

0910

I'd like to share a few examples of how CMHA Toronto supports the government's vision for comprehensive, connected and convenient care. We operate in more than 30 locations across Toronto. We support over 22,000 people every year, offering services across the continuum of care, from crisis response and supportive housing, to case management and intensive clinical supports, to primary care and employment supports. We see every day how closely mental health, addictions, housing and poverty are connected and the consequences when people can't access timely support.

That's why we're proud to be one of the community partners in the Toronto Community Crisis Service, a community-based mobile crisis team of mental health professionals who provide in-person support to people experiencing mental health crisis. Since launching in 2022, TCCS has received over 50,000 calls, dispatched mobile crisis teams more than 41,000 times and completed over 11,600 referrals to health and social services. In all of these calls, we have involved police and the emergency department in less than 2% of the calls.

Crisis response is only one part of our continuum of care. We are contributing to the government's plan to connect every Ontarian to primary care teams by 2029 by bringing primary care into community mental health settings, where many people and where our clients traditionally face barriers to care, in the traditional primary care clinics. Last year, more than 6,600 people received primary care from one or more of our programs. We have 28 programs that facilitate access to primary care.

As Ontario expands its primary care system, community mental health organizations like CMHA Toronto must be part of that solution so that our clients don't get left behind. That's one of the reasons we're asking for a base budget increase of less than 3%. This modest investment would help us keep pace with demand, sustain the services that people rely on and continue to reach Ontarians who need support.

I'll now turn it over to my colleague David Smith.

Mr. David Smith: Thank you, Michael.

The story is much the same here at CMHA Peel Dufferin, where we serve approximately 1.7 million residents across Peel region and Dufferin county, including the cities of Mississauga, Brampton, Orangeville and Bolton.

We're seeing significant growth in demand for services. Last year alone, we served 30% more clients than we had in the prior year. Across the province, in 2025, CMHAs served 121,000 Ontarians, a 21% increase since 2019.

Our branch responds to these growing needs through a range of community-based mental health and addictions services, including our rapid access addictions medicine clinics, which offer community-based assessment, medication-assisted treatment and counselling and connect people to ongoing care once they are stabilized.

With a clinic open every day—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): If I could stop you for a moment—and if we could introduce ourselves before we started speaking.

Mr. David Smith: Oh, sorry. I thought I was introduced at the beginning. David Smith, CEO of Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Dufferin.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

Mr. David Smith: Our branch responds to these services through our rapid access addictions medicine clinics. We have a clinic open every day somewhere across the region. Clients can access help when they are ready.

These services also reduce pressure on the health care system. One study found that within 90 days of care, rapid access addictions medicine clinics reduced emergency department visits by 63% and withdrawal management service use by 97%.

We are also the lead agency in Brampton for the HART hub. We appreciate the government's support of this integrated approach and hope to see more of these models established across the province. For the two of us in particular, there's a need for one in Mississauga and in northern Toronto, where the need is still very significant and there's no local HART hub.

Delivering these services requires sustained investment. In both Peel and Dufferin, limited funding means we are only able to operate clinics in local communities once a week, leaving clients to travel significant distances or delay treatment.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. David Smith: Additional funding would allow us to expand our reach, increase access to timely interventions and improve outcomes.

As you see, our work helps support many areas of care across the province. A one-time base budget increase would help sustain these services and ensure Ontarians can access the timely mental health and addictions care they need when they need it.

Thank you. I'm looking forward to answering questions.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will hear from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Antonella Di Carlo. I am a Catholic teacher and president of the Toronto secondary unit of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I represent 2,500 Catholic teachers, who teach 28,000 secondary students in publicly funded Catholic schools across Toronto.

Over the past nine years, the Ontario government's chronic underfunding has left our schools $6.5 billion behind. We see the impact every day through shortages of basic supplies, unreliable technology and students waiting for essential supports. Today I want to share what it looks like in Toronto Catholic secondary schools and why the 2027 budget must address these concerns.

Catholic teachers want nothing more than to do the job we love in an environment that supports student success, but we need a government willing to invest in resources and give the students the support they deserve. According to the Conference Board of Canada, every dollar invested in publicly funded education generates approximately $1.30 in economic benefits for Ontario, yet our schools continue to be shortchanged.

The families, students, teachers and education workers I speak with are frustrated. They see the impact of funding cuts in their classrooms every day. One of the clearest examples is the lack of basic classroom resources. Current funding for school supplies amounts to approximately 72 cents per student per day. Teachers regularly report shortages of essentials such as paper, pencils and textbooks. Teachers are simply not being provided with the basic tools they need to do their jobs. They should not have to struggle to access teaching materials or spend their own money to meet the needs of students, yet this is happening across our board.

Students and teachers have the right to learn and work in a safe, healthy environment. Unfortunately, according to a recent province-wide survey of Catholic teachers, violence has become the new norm in our schools. More than nine out of 10 have experienced or witnessed violence or harassment at school, reporting an average of seven violent incidents each year. These incidents are often cries for help from vulnerable students. Without appropriate supports, behaviours can escalate while teachers face increasing stress and burnout. Catholic teachers are calling for sustained investments in safer schools, including smaller class sizes, more school-based professionals and stable mental health funding.

Technology is another area where students and teachers are feeling the cuts. Every student deserves reliable technology, yet schools face shortages of functioning laptops, unreliable Internet connectivity and inadequate digital resources. Teachers are even bringing their own devices from home to support learning.

More recently, digital storage capacity, essential for teaching and learning, has been reduced by 97%. This

drastic reduction directly impacts students and teachers. Educators are being forced to delete valuable instructional materials while students face limitations in storing and accessing their work. These are not simply administrative inconveniences. They are barriers that make teaching and learning increasingly difficult.

Just yesterday, a member told me she has 32 students and only 10 textbooks to share among them. Combined with limited technology and inconsistent resources, planning and delivering effective lessons has become increasingly difficult. Her frustration was not about the inconvenience to herself; she simply wants her students to succeed.

0920

How can we expect teachers to deliver quality education without the basic resources and technologies required to do their job? Our students do not need more centralized control in the backrooms of Queen's Park or unresponsive government-appointed supervisors. They need smaller class sizes, safer schools and access to resources, technology and supports necessary for success.

Front-line teachers know what students need to succeed. The government should listen to those working directly with students and engage meaningfully with educators, parents and school communities.

Our students are our future. A real plan to protect Ontario must include a commitment to their success and healthier learning environments for students and education alike.

As you prepare the 2027 budget, I urge you to listen to local school communities and invest in the publicly funded education system our students deserve. Catholic teachers stand ready to share our professional experience and expertise—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: —to ensure every student has the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

Thank you, and I will be happy to take any questions.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

That concludes the presentations. We will now start the first round of questions with MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much. I'll do my best to have questions for all three of you.

My first question is to Antonella Di Carlo, the president of OECTA Toronto district chapter. It's pretty alarming to hear about the serious shortages of basic supplies like textbooks and pencils and pens and paper and laptops in the schools. I'm certainly hearing it from other school boards as well.

When I looked at the fall economic statement, the mini-budget, I saw, to my shock, that base education spending is going to increase by less than 1%—which is well below the rate of inflation—for existing education service levels. That makes me very concerned because it makes me think that the problems that we're seeing right now are just going to go from bad to worse.

I want to talk about class sizes. What has OECTA observed about class size changes, and what impact has that had on education?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Thank you for your question.

Class sizes are at the max, and overages—we try to maintain that they don't go over, but there's also a lot of blended classes and different subjects. It's called "V-coding"—that's one of the terms used—which means there's different subjects in one class. That creates a lot of difficulty for teachers because they're teaching multiple curriculums at once, but class sizes are to the max. I think they called it rightsize staffing—there was an expression that my board used, but it means to the max.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Wow, I did not know that was happening in a high school setting.

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Yes, it is.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I noticed recently that OECTA took a strike vote, and 98% of teachers voted in support of a strike mandate. Why do you think the strike vote was so high?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: I think the strike vote is so high because there's a lot of burnout with teachers not getting proper resources. The violence in the school has a big impact, and the lack of funding around special education, especially students with autism—we are receiving more and more students with special education needs, with diverse needs, and that requires more money to deliver proper programming.

Ms. Jessica Bell: You have to do so much, and every year, it just seems like you've got less to deal with.

My next question is to Michael Anhorn from the Canadian Mental Health Association. In my riding—I think in every riding—we have a lot of issues. We see open drug use. We see encampments; we have, in Toronto, thousands of people who are homeless every night. And I want to commend the work that your association and your partners are doing to address mental health and addiction.

Just focusing on addiction, what two things should the Ontario government do that you think would be most effective in tackling chronic addiction, especially on opioid addiction?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: David, do you want to take this one?

Mr. David Smith: Yes, I can jump in on that, for sure.

Two of the things we talked about in the presentation: the HART hubs, which is a program that reaches out into encampments, engages individuals who are homeless, alongside people who are marginally housed, and engaging them in getting support and services, that program begins with primary care and building relationships that then allow you to do the counselling and treatment that comes afterwards, and rapid access addiction medicine clinics, which treat both cravings and use patterns in order to reduce the need or reliance on opioids—so those are a couple of things that are quite effective.

As we said, we have in our area clinics that operate each day throughout the region but not ones that are in each area throughout the region every day. In other words, six days of the week, people can't walk into a local clinic, which is ideally where we'd want to be.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It surprises me, some of the work we're doing in public accounts. It surprised me that if someone is ready for addiction treatment, wants addiction

treatment, it's actually sometimes quite hard to get. It's hard to get from your primary care provider. It's difficult to get in the hospital if you end up in an emergency room.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Jessica Bell: And we heard from experts pretty loud and clear that making it really easy to access addiction treatment can really lower the number of people that are experiencing addiction.

I want to talk briefly about supportive housing—it's to the mental health association as well. The fall economic statement shows that there's no new money for supportive housing. What kind of investment do we need to see in supportive housing to tackle the issues we're seeing in our communities?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thank you for your question. In Toronto alone, we're estimating we need about 20,000 units of supported housing in order to meet the demand that is there.

Ms. Jessica Bell: And what do we have right now?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: We have about 18,000, so it would need to about double or just slightly more than double.

Housing is fundamental to people's stability, both in addictions and mental health. Without housing, clinical plans don't work, and if they work, they don't stick. So it is something that CMHA would love to work with the government on to advance, and especially—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair, thank you to all of you for being here today and taking part in these pre-budget consultations. I can't believe we're already in November and the new year is just around the corner.

Diane, thanks for talking about the important work that realtors do in helping people buy and sell within the community. Supply is, I think, one really important element in the market to help either stabilize prices or even bring prices down. It is a little bit of economics 101.

Now, not too many years ago, the government committed to building 1.5 million new homes, and when we look at the numbers right now, probably the progress on that by 2031 is going to be half of that. Is what you're suggesting—do you think that's enough in order to get the housing starts that we need, especially for young people that are hoping to enter the housing market?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Thank you for the question. It's a dangerous question. No association would ever think it's enough, but we also appreciate the limitations and the challenges and the priorities.

When we look at the numbers when the HST rebate was introduced, we can't deny how well it was received and how it increased those numbers and, as you said, those numbers that are difficult to reach. That's the reason why, obviously, we are suggesting that it be—understanding that it's a collaboration between the federal and provincial governments, we think it's extremely important to expand it for another year, I think, most importantly because when the program was introduced, there was already some building that was coming to the market. After two quarters, we're starting to see that there needs to be a bit more incentive to get people to start building again, and that's the only way we'll reach the numbers.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. You know, I think about a year before this government introduced that HST rebate, I was in the House calling for the government to do that and Ontario Liberals were doing that in September as well, understanding that if we want the skilled trades workers to continue to be working and paying income tax through their employment, that's another important element to it.

0930

I want to ask a little bit about multiplexes. Does OREA have a position right now around how do we make it easier for multiplexes—maybe let's say a triplex, for example—to be condo-ized instead of just staying as a rental? We're talking about a new build. Does OREA have a position around that so far?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: OREA does have a position. I must apologize; I don't have all of the details. Obviously, we have presented some alternatives and some solutions. The biggest challenge, I must say though, as we talk about the HST rebate or any other program, is the importance of focusing on affordable housing. When we talk about affordable housing, it's housing for young families, so duplexes and triplexes are key. I will go back to—obviously, it looks as if we're sticking to message, but the HST program is instrumental in assisting in that, what we would call the middle market.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'm just wondering as well, whether it's entering the market or you buy your first place—sometimes it's a smaller condo or a smaller home and you want to move up, or let's say you're a senior that wants to downsize—do you think the province should be making it easier for folks to be able to do that?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Absolutely. The statistics show that most young families or adults in Ontario want to own a house and nearly the same amount believe they can't afford to. All of the incentives that we can provide to allow them to own their first house or to upgrade would be key.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

To the Canadian Mental Health Association, thanks for being here today. It's a big challenge in the province itself. I think what you're asking for seems quite reasonable—a base funding increase of less than 3%. What will that mean for communities?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: A base increase of over 3% will allow us to continue what we're doing and it will allow us to ensure our staff continue to be paid fair wages and maintain the high-quality services that we offer.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I understand that almost 200 positions at CMHA branches were forced to be vacant because of funding constraints. Will that help solve it?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: That will prevent further vacancy requirements.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So we really need to do more than what you're asking here, but this is just, how do we kind of stabilize the existing situation—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you to our presenters this morning.

Diane, I'll start with you. You touched on modernizing the professionalism of the industry, and I'm just wondering if OREA has any recommendations to improve consumer confidence and those professional standards in the real estate industry in addition to the policies that the government is currently consulting on.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Yes, thank you for the question. It is in fact an important matter for the association and the profession. In our white paper on TRESA phase 3, we have made several recommendations. I'll just point to a couple of them.

One is suggesting or recommending a new two-year articling and mentorship requirement for new registrants so that registrants are better prepared to handle the market's evolving demands. Obviously, it's supporting training but also focusing very much on those new entrants to the market to make sure that they can serve consumers, provide accurate information and protect, in fact, our consumers.

The other recommendation that we made is also permitting specialty certification designations by enacting section 8 of TRESA. The possible designations would include commercial, waterfront, recreational, agriculture and condominiums. That ensures that we are in fact training and providing educational support to realtors who are selling in different markets and to different consumers. Those are key.

Finally—not the only recommendation or the last recommendation but an important one—I think you put your money where your mouth is or vice versa—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Sorry.

The paper recommends stronger penalties to deter bad behaviour.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay. One more question: In my neck of the woods—I'm in a rural riding—we don't have to unlock more housing. There is a ton of houses sitting there for months and months on end with for sale signs, and they're not selling. Would OREA support rebates for people who are doing home renovations and additions when they can't sell their house?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Absolutely. In fact, it's interesting because—the other member mentioned economic activity. So if the house cannot be sold for all sorts of reasons—it could be location, market conditions or the likes—incentivizing consumers to upgrade their home is absolutely supported by OREA and its members.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Allsopp.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you to all three presenters for taking the time to be here at Queen's Park with us for these pre-budget consultations. The feedback that you provide for us is incredibly important, and I really want to appreciate you being here today.

My first question is for Michael Anhorn and David Smith from CMHA. It's about the HART hubs that you were discussing in your opening address. As you know, we put forward about $560 million to establish 29 of these hubs across Ontario, including in my home community of Belleville, Ontario, as well. It's up and running and working quite well. I'm just wondering, from the CMHA's perspective, what sort of KPIs and what sort of early evidence have you seen to suggest that we're improving access to mental health, to treatment and to housing supports?

Mr. David Smith: I'll take that one, if you like, Michael.

We run the Hart hub in Brampton. It's been open now for over six months. You're seeing a lot of people—I think on a typical day, we have 28 individuals that will come in and seek support and help. Much of that is related to activities of daily living and getting clean and getting food, but we're also seeing that engagement then turns into more support, more primary care and, ultimately, we have a number of people that have ended up in housing as a result of that.

It's early days, but the pipeline is working. People are engaging with us and finding their way into the ultimate goal, which is housing beyond something temporary.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Very good—thank you very much.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Thank you to all of this morning's presenters.

My question is for the Canadian Mental Health Association, specifically for you, Michael. So, a couple of questions: First of all, I just wanted to mention that we are the first government in Ontario's history to create a portfolio specifically to deal with mental health and addictions. I just wondered if you could tell us about your thoughts from the Canadian Mental Health Association, if you could speak more to the effects that you think that the creation of this new ministry has had for the Canadian Mental Health Association across the province of Ontario.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks so much for the question. We've had very close relationships at CMHA, with all three of the Associate Ministers of Mental Health and Addictions. We're very thankful the government has created a home for mental health. That allows us to interact directly with a cabinet minister on our priorities, and what we're hearing from our clients is the needs that are in the community, and also to provide input into the policy development and the plans as they're made and developed and redeveloped. So we very much appreciate that that home in government has been created.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Well, thank you. You also touched a little bit on primary care attachment in your comments earlier, and I just wondered if maybe we could dig a little bit deeper, and you could talk about—we have the primary care action plan here, where we're attaching everyone in

Ontario to a primary care clinician and starting to invest more money in team-based care.

I know in my riding, in Burlington, Ontario, we recently were announcing a new community health centre that will be opening in a couple of weeks, which we're really looking forward to. So not only will that attach more people to a primary care clinician, but it's kind of those allied health services and supports that will be available to help people who are attached to that health centre.

0940

I'm wondering if you could maybe just talk about the benefits of that model and team-based care when it comes to mental health and addictions.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Yes. Team-based care is critical for our clients—people with severe mental health and addiction concerns—because their needs aren't separate. So, yes, they need primary care, but they still need their mental health care addressed at the same time, and often they need housing and physical supports all addressed at once.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: What we're doing is actually integrating primary care into mental health settings because we understand the clients a little bit better. Our clients and their behaviours don't always integrate well into normal or regular primary care clinics, so we're able to provide a space where they feel comfortable and where our clinicians deeply understand their needs and can respond in ways that are helpful and provide the primary care.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: Okay. Well, thank you for that.

One other thing that we're modelling in my community with the expansion of these team-based-care clinics is the ability for practising physicians who may be a sole practitioner to refer their patients into these community health centres, into these family health teams, so that their patients have access to these allied health care professionals, including—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

Now we will go to MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My questions are, first off, to the representatives from the Canadian Mental Health Association. Could you just give me a little bit of an assessment of the hubs housing model? How many people does it serve and how many, if any, supportive housing units are provided as part of the housing hubs model?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: My colleague David will take that question.

Mr. David Smith: In HART hubs—we're involved in a couple of them—I think the number of housing units varies from HART hub to HART hub, but the Brampton one is just over 30 that are dedicated to the HART hub. But that's not the only housing work that takes place there. We also continue to engage with private landlords, and we are working with the local housing providers for supportive units. There are temporary units that are being used as well. So there are a variety of solutions employed, but dedicated housing units is in the neighbourhood of 30 per, I believe.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm in support of the HART hub model. I think it's very good that there's increased investment, but what concerns me is that it's pretty small when we look at the actual scope of the problem. From what I have gathered, HART hubs might have up to 900 supportive housing units, but that's happening at a time when we're hearing that 36,000 people are on wait-lists to access supportive housing that comes with addiction treatment and mental health treatment. We're here when we need to be over there, so my hope is that we'd see some increased investments in the budget that's coming up.

I want to talk a little bit about consumption sites. In my riding, we've got one of the last consumption sites in Toronto. The rest of them have essentially been closed, and it has led to a massive increase in open drug use within our specific area.

From your viewpoint, what has been the impact of closing consumption sites on addiction use and overdoses?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: In Toronto, we definitely have seen an increase in open drug use. What I would say from our perspective is that safe consumption sites are part of the solution, as are HART hubs. What we're really trying to emphasize is the need for the continuum of services and a variety of services. There's no one way that we're going to solve this; we need multiple approaches because each person is a little bit different and responds to different approaches.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, it certainly concerns me. I'd rather have someone use in a room with a health care worker nearby as opposed to going to a Tim Hortons washroom, overdosing and dying, because it's very difficult to treat someone once they're dead.

I hear rumours—and this is something that's certainly being explored in other provinces—about this approach of forced treatment, which is when an individual is given medical care against their will. Often, this is applied in the case of addiction.

Does CMHA have a position on forced treatment? If so, it would be good if you could explain it. What is its success rate, for instance?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Yes. David, do you want to take that?

Mr. David Smith: I'm good either way, yes.

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Go ahead.

Mr. David Smith: Yes, okay.

Forced treatment is very debatable. I think that as an association, our position is, if we want to help people, we have ways of helping people. The ways that we help people are being there with rapid access, addictions medicine, clinics, housing and supports for counselling and treatment around them when people want it.

The challenge with forced is "when people want it." If you want addictions treatment to work, it needs to be both the provider and the person seeking help wanting success at that moment. That's when you're going to have your greatest level of success.

What we focus on is being there alongside people so when they have that moment of revelation, that moment of desire for change, we're there and we're able to support in that moment.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My hope is that we're certainly starting to provide treatment to people who are ready for it. If we did that quickly and rapidly and effectively, my hope is we would see a rapid reduction in open drug use and addiction.

My final question, just briefly, is to the OECTA Toronto chapter president. The Auditor General just completed an investigation into special education, and the results were, quite frankly, pretty shocking: a lot of staff burnout, a lot of staff shortages, a lot of students not receiving mandated support. What are OECTA members telling you about what they're seeing when it comes to special education in schools?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: There is a reduction in special education staffing because of funding, and we've been taken over by the ministry supervisor; Frank Benedetto is ours. They don't provide enough PPE, which is protective equipment. A lot of teachers are getting hit in the head—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now go to MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair, to Michael, just to pick up a little bit on where we were previously, the federal government—and this isn't their most recent budget; I'm talking about a year ago—allocated a billion dollars to pay for the construction of supportive and transitional housing.

One of the concerns that I've heard in my community—and there are projects that have been submitted, but they're not moving forward yet—is the lack of an operating agreement in order to fund the operation of those units. Is that a problem?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Yes. Thanks for your question.

CMHA really does believe that the only way we'll solve homelessness is for all levels of government and community organizations to work together. The federal government has committed capital dollars, and we are hoping to work with the provincial government to find operating dollars for those supports because, again, once people have been unhoused for any period of time, they need supports to maintain their housing.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I'm hoping alongside yourself, folks in the sector and, frankly, folks that are on streets right now and are not getting the wrap-around supports that they need to help get better, move on with their lives and make our communities stronger. So thank you for being here today and your continued advocacy.

Antonella, thank you for being here today, and thank you to your members as well for what they do.

We were just talking just a little bit earlier around violence in the classroom. Violence in the classroom isn't a kid with a knife at school, right? Can you explain what your members are experiencing and dealing with in the classroom right now?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Are you saying it isn't a knife in school?

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It isn't.

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: It is.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Okay.

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Yes, there are knives in the schools and up to guns in Toronto.

Unfortunately, my members are experiencing burnout and fear. There are more work refusals if they're in imminent danger, more than ever before. We're fortunate we have six health and safety people in our board to support. The union also supports, but the violence is rapidly growing in the areas that are underfunded and in the more needy areas.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So you're saying in some parts of Toronto, you're dealing with some of those situations, and then in other situations, it's a kid that's dysregulated that isn't getting the support that they need otherwise for mental health?

0950

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: We're now seeing it in all parts of Toronto. It's not isolated to only certain areas. It's moved. I mean, there are many factors that impact that, like social media. There are a lot of things that contribute to it—family structure. There are a lot of things. But funding, having the people there for the students in special ed areas, in needy areas, that's what would make a difference.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I have a youth council in my riding. I'm in Ajax, just east of Toronto, and I met with students from both the public and the Catholic boards at the secondary level. What they're saying aligns very much with what you're saying here today around resources: that there aren't enough physical textbooks, that the digital resources aren't necessarily working for kids, that there's not enough budget to do photocopies and paper. I'm actually hearing from those students that some of them prefer to use paper and some of them prefer to use that textbook.

What impact does that have then on the teacher in the classroom when those resources aren't there?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Like I said when I spoke, they're scrambling for paper. Photocopy paper is being kept under lock and key—I didn't want to say it—at some schools. It's being monitored, so they have to ask for paper. There are no textbooks, no paper, and now the latest is that they've reduced digital storage from 500 gigabytes to 15 gigabytes, and it's the free storage that's being provided. Everybody knows. So a lot of student work has gotten stuck. They can't even turn their work in. So I don't know, but if I was a parent, I would be pretty upset.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We hear the government's answer to some of the classroom materials is the $750 card. Now, that's at the elementary level. Are you seeing any additional supports at the secondary level to help ensure that those resources are there?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: A lot of people think that the $750 was also for secondary. There was nothing for

secondary. But even that $750—Staples is very expensive. I'm not critical of Staples; I don't oversee businesses. But even the way the money was given—I don't know because that's in elementary. Nothing was provided in secondary, and secondary needs resources as well.

But teachers are spending thousands, not $750. And if you don't have computers and proper technology, $750 cannot buy you anything.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: It sounds like a lot of smoke and mirrors from the province right now on this, quite frankly. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'll turn to Michael and David. The 2.67% base funding increase: If you were to receive that, if the wand was waved, how would that increase be applied?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Every branch would apply it slightly differently based on the community need, but a good portion of that would go to making sure that we can provide an inflation increase to our staff's salaries. Some of our branches are unionized, so they have no choice but to do that. Other branches are not unionized, but our staff are falling behind. So we would really make sure that our staff, who do such incredible work and very difficult work in very difficult situations, continue to be paid fairly.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: So how does that support those vulnerable people in the community?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: If our staff are not paid well, they don't offer as good a service. We know this; there's an increase in the turnover. Continuity of care is critical in mental health care, and there's also generally increased sick time leave. The stability of our workforce impacts directly the experience of our clients.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you for that. I'd like to turn the conversation to outcomes. How does CMHA measure positive outcomes?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Thanks—great question. At CMHA Toronto, we've taken a leadership role in trying to identify what the outcomes are that clients experience in their lives. We don't just measure outputs, how many people come to our programs, but what changes happen in their life. We use the Ontario Common Assessment of Need as one of the measures. We have a variety of evidence-based measures and tools that we use to measure that impact. We also measure clients' experience of care through the OPOC—Ontario Perception of Care—survey so that we know not just are we helping them, but also what is their experience of care.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay. So a positive outcome would be someone who is now living independently may be a productive member of society and no longer facing addictions issues every single day?

Mr. Michael Anhorn: Correct.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you.

I'll move on to OECTA. I'm just curious: Integration, in my opinion, does not seem to be working in this province right now. You talk about needing increased funding to make that work. Would OECTA be willing to actually reimagine a system and have an honest conversation about integration today?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Yes, absolutely. We would be in support of integration with the right resources, with appropriate resources. But it is not working today because the manpower, support, people are not there. The resources, again, are not there to support integration. It's not meaningful integration. The students are not learning.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Do we require more specialized classrooms?

Ms. Antonella Di Carlo: Yes.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We now go to MPP Denault.

MPP Billy Denault: I have a question for Diane. Diane, I just want to touch on some of your remarks that you made earlier today in talking about some of the programs that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has come in through, things like the development charge reduction program, the HST reduction, removing that on all new homes for all homebuyers. It sounds like OREA was very supportive of those sorts of initiatives. So I just want to ask, from your perspective and those who you serve for, what sort of impact are those sorts of initiatives and investments going to have on the housing market in the province of Ontario, if could you expand on that?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Well, in fact, I was providing a few statistics earlier on. They speak for themselves. When we're talking about the HST, and other programs, as you noted, from April to June 2026, Ontario new home sales rose by 130% year over year, in the first quarter. So 21,000 jobs and 8,000 additional housing starts are projected due to the HST rebate. It has an impact not only on homebuyers but on the communities, on trade. It is an economic engine. But obviously, because of the macroeconomics, having that kind of incentive is just at least helping the market continue to grow.

What is also extremely important is that it is feeding housing in what we call the missing middle. I think there was a question early on about duplexes and triplexes and being able to switch those into condos versus rentals. That is one of the solutions for the missing middle. But all of those programs are instrumental in ensuring that we have a growing market and housing for those who are looking for it.

MPP Billy Denault: Perfect. Well, thanks, Diane, for taking the time. We appreciate you being here to share those statistics with us.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: It's a pleasure. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to all the presenters for being the first group to come to our pre-budget consultations. I'm looking forward to the additional 13 sessions. I also—

Interjections.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I really am; that's genuine.

I also wanted to ask the Ontario Real Estate Association a question. Diane, I was recently at the city of Guelph for their development charge reduction program announcement, awarding them over $40 million. It was great to be—we were at a Reid's Heritage Homes development, stacked townhouses in Guelph. They're building a similar product in my community of Fergus. City council was there, staff—got to learn about the pumping stations and the waste water facility expansion that that money is going to be used for to benefit the people of Guelph.

At the end of the day, affordability is the bottom line: saving thousands of dollars for homebuyers. Those stackable houses, townhouses, are great for young professionals, first-time homebuyers. This will benefit them.

I also want to give a shout-out to MPP Pierre, my colleague here beside me. Her motion calling on the government to have that outlined, what is the development charge cost when you have that bill of sale, so that people in Guelph can compare to people in other communities and see how much they have to spend when they buy their home in development charges. Thank you, MPP Pierre, for bringing that forward.

Diane, can you just speak to how these housing initiatives will contribute to Ontario's broader economic growth and competitiveness beyond just housing affordability?

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Thank you for the question. Thank you very much for your support in working with OREA and the communities to try to eliminate the DCs and to work to find ways to support and fund infrastructure. We are not naive; we understand that that has to happen in the communities. Working together to find ways where the homebuyers are not penalized—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Did we just say "one minute"?

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: One minute.

Ms. Diane Brisebois: Okay, I'm still thinking of all the sessions you have to listen to I'm a bit—it is the economic activity in all of the communities. It's not just the building industry; it is trade, services, restaurants, retail. So it is extremely important to support the growth of the housing market and also to ensure that there are houses for what we call the "missing middle."

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I know there are a few seconds left. Thank you very much for your coming and giving us ideas to improve the market. From OREA's point of few, can you—in a few seconds—give us some idea about the condition of the market? Like, what does the availability—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the questions.

It also concludes the time for this panel. I want to say thank you to the panellists for your participation and for the time you took to prepare to be with us this morning, both virtually and at the table. Thank you very much for helping us.

And with that, the committee now stands recessed until 3 o'clock this afternoon.

The committee recessed from 1002 to 1500.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO STUDENTS' UNION
RAISING THE ROOF
COUNCIL OF CANADIAN INNOVATORS

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Good afternoon, everyone. We'll now resume public hearings on the 2027 pre-budget consultations.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we've heard from all three presenters in this one-hour time slot, the remaining 39 minutes will be used for questions from the members of the committee. This time of questions will be divided into two rounds of five minutes and 30 seconds for the government members, five minutes and 30 seconds for the official opposition members, five minutes and 30 seconds for the recognized third party member and three minutes for the independent member of the committee. I will provide a verbal reminder to notify you when we have one minute left for your presentation or allotted speaking time, and that means one minute. Don't stop, because at the end, I will say "Thank you."

Please wait until you're recognized by the Chair before speaking and, as always, all comments should go through the Chair.

With that, I would welcome the panel and remind the panel that as each one of you speaks, you identify yourself to make sure that we can attribute your presentation to the right person on the panel.

With that, we will start this afternoon with the University of Toronto Students' Union, Raising the Roof and Council of Canadian Innovators.

With the first presenter, the University of Toronto Students' Union, we need unanimous consent from the committee. They have two members that would like to sit at the table to make the presentation, and we need unanimous consent from the committee to allow that. Hearing no objection, the floor is now yours.

Ms. Marie Kinderman: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Marie Kinderman, and I am the president of the University of Toronto Students' Union at U of T St. George.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Hello. My name is Nadège Jackiw, and I am the vice-president of public and university affairs.

Ms. Marie Kinderman: Thank you, everyone, for the opportunity to speak today. We are here to raise yet more concerns about OSAP. This is an issue that directly affects the accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education across Ontario, and particularly at U of T since we happen to be there.

For thousands of students, OSAP is more than just financial assistance. It is what makes pursuing a post-secondary education possible in the first place, especially in today's economic times. However, recent developments have raised serious questions about how effectively this province is managing and protecting these vital resources and who ends up applying when the system falls short.

Firstly, being the misuse of OSAP funding at private career colleges: On November 12, the provincial govern-

ment announced proposed legislative reforms aimed at strengthening institutional oversight, improving student verification and recovering improperly allocated OSAP funds. These proposals present an important opportunity to reconsider how Ontario approaches financial accountability within the post-secondary sector. However, greater financial accountability should never have come at the expense of students' financial accessibility.

Concerns surrounding OSAP misuse did not happen overnight. We were warned about suspicious activity within these private career colleges well before the government's recent announcements. This raises an important question. Why should we, as students, bear the financial consequences of failures occurring in institutional oversight? While we recognize the importance of preventing fraud and protecting taxpayer dollars, broad suspensions of OSAP funding risk penalizing students attending institutions that have simply done nothing wrong. Instead of relying on blanket funding restrictions, Ontario should prioritize targeted enforcement, transparency within investigations and stronger institutional accountability, while protecting students who legitimately depend on this financial assistance to go to school and to live.

These proposed reforms also raise yet another larger concern: the future of non-repayable OSAP grants. Earlier this year, the provincial government announced significant reductions to the proportion of OSAP assistance available as grants, which make students more reliant on repayable loans. But when financial mismanagement is occurring at the institutional level, reducing students' non-repayable assistance should not be treated as the first solution.

Stronger oversight could allow for the province to identify improper expenditures, recover those misallocated resources and redirect available funding towards legitimate educational needs. We, as students, believe that any resources recovered through these measures should be reinvested into student financial assistance like OSAP, particularly non-repayable grants that reduce the financial burden of pursuing higher education. Financial accountability and education accessibility should not be in competition with one another; they work together.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Thank you, Marie.

This isn't abstract for us; this is what our own student census told us last year. Nearly two thirds of respondents—63.9% of students—reported a personal income below $10,000 a year. For many students, this number barely covers the cost of tuition and books, but not much more. Students still have to make rent, buy expensive groceries and make their way around.

More than three quarters of our students rely on support from family, relatives or friends to stay afloat. Across every core expense—tuition, housing, food and transit—family support is the single most common funding source out of loans, scholarships and of work. So when the province shifts assistance from grants to loans, it doesn't level the playing field; it rewards students who already have family wealth and pushes everyone else into further debt.

And when a blanket funding restriction hits, the students it hurts most are precisely those without a safety net. For them, the consequence isn't an inconvenience; it's whether they can continue going to school at all.

This is why financial accountability and education accessibility have to work together. Stronger oversight could allow the province to identify improper expenditures, recover those misallocated resources and redirect available funding toward legitimate educational needs. We believe any resources recovered through these measures should be reinvested into student financial assistance, particularly non-repayable grants that reduce the financial burden of pursuing higher education.

As Ontario moves forward with its proposed reforms, we urge the provincial government to make three commitments.

The first is to restore the proportion of OSAP assistance allocated to non-repayable grants to at least 85%, returning to the 2018 funding model. The government should consider its decision to apply system-wide reduction in grant assistance, particularly given the significant growth in OSAP expenditures associated with private career colleges. As proposed in opposition motion number 6, restoring the 85% grant motion would help preserve the affordability and accessibility of post-secondary education for students attending publicly assisted colleges and universities.

The second commitment is to protect eligible students. We want to ensure that no student is penalized by indiscriminate funding restrictions for wrongdoings that they did not commit and that recovered resources are reinvested into students' financial assistance.

The third commitment is to commit to protecting the long-term affordability of OSAP through increased grant funding and more transparent reporting. The government should establish clear reporting on OSAP assistance distributed as grants versus loans, the number of students receiving non-repayable assistance and the impact of these funding changes on student borrowing. Future OSAP budget decisions should prioritize maintaining meaningful grant support, rather than relying on increased student debt.

I want to recognize that OSAP has significant financial pressures on this government, and I'm not arguing that the government should disregard those costs. However, I question whether shifting assistance from grants to loans is the most appropriate way to address them.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: A grant reduction doesn't eliminate the cost of education, but it transfers a greater proportion of that cost from the government onto the students.

I believe the government should examine more targeted alternatives and prioritize restoring the grants that support students and make post-secondary education accessible. And as a student, I ask you to consider this, not for sympathy but for fairness. Students did not create this problem, and students should not be made to pay for it. Please do not balance the budget on the backs of the people you're supposed to be investing in.

The students I know, the students I represent and the thousands of other students across Ontario are not asking for much. We are asking for you to consider it a chance to let us learn without being buried in debt. Students should not have to choose between a government that is responsibly managing funds and one that makes post-secondary education affordable. Ontario can and must do both.

Thank you so much.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We now will hear from Raising the Roof.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Thank you, Chair and members of committee, for having me today. My name is Leslie Bellingham, and I'm the director of strategic initiatives and partnerships at Raising the Roof, a national charitable housing developer. You may know us from our toque campaign, where we've raised millions of dollars for homelessness prevention over almost 30 years. Since 2020, we have been directly developing, owning and operating affordable and supportive housing. In Ontario, we operate 119 homes which have been safe, stable, affordable housing for more than 200 people who were at risk of homelessness or who were experiencing homelessness before they moved into our homes.

Getting more homes built is necessary, but we also need to address the funding barriers that keep community housing projects from moving forward, so I came with two particular requests. The first is in the area of flexible, timely capital, and the second is in the area of better coordination between capital funding and support service funding for supportive housing.

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Giving you an example of how this looks and the kind of housing that Raising the Roof operates, we operate throughout the affordable housing continuum from deeply affordable up to affordable below-market rents. For one of our projects not very far from here in North York, we purchased the property in 2019 and we developed it into a home that now has been housing for young women who are coming directly from shelter into this home, really as that next-stage housing where they're able to gain independence, life skills and pay affordable rent. They can save up to be able to move on to market rent and market home ownership which, actually, several of the young women who have lived there have done. They have moved out and been able to have those life skills to be able to move out on their own.

That's the thing I'm most excited about this work. It's not a band-aid solution; it's not something temporary. It's something that really helps people to move forward in life and to be less reliant on costly emergency services and that cycle of crisis intervention after crisis intervention.

To be able to make housing like this possible, the two things, like I was saying, that we really need is the right capital at the right time. It's not just the amount of money, but it's the kind of capital and when it's available. We really need flexible, first-in capital for acquisition, predevelopment and construction. Even conditional commitments for this can really help unlock more and to leverage for more funding.

I'm sure you've seen the federal budget announcement. From the federal level, there's huge investments going into this recapitalization of Build Canada Homes. We're in deep talks with Build Canada Homes. They have funded some of our projects. Something they've really told us is that they are very hesitant to fund projects that don't have provincial commitments. It's been a big issue for us, really, especially in Ontario, where it's very complex. There are 47 different service managers, all in different communities, that you have to be able to coordinate with and access. They all have their own priorities. Even if they have a provincial mandate, the way that they actually operate this is much different in each of the communities. There is no real coordination this way.

Really, everyone in affordable housing development wants to be last in; nobody wants to be first. But the fact is that we really do rely on having non-repayable capital, grants and things like that, to be able to make it pencil. It just doesn't pencil without that.

There are great programs like the Building Ontario Fund. The flexible catalytic financing approach is excellent, but grants and forgivable loans are still necessary, and there really seems to be, especially from the federal government level, a need for being able to layer them and them looking to the provincial government as a co-contributor to it.

Also, in that alignment of the capital and support services, there's something else we've really seen, that—for us, we are a willing participant in this. We want to partner with the federal government and the provincial government to do this. We are willing to manage the projects. We are willing to own and operate the housing. We're willing to come alongside local partners to deliver the support services. That's our model. But without having long-term, multi-year support service funding, we usually can't unlock the capital that makes it possible to build these.

Same thing: The federal government will say, "We have earmarked supportive housing funding for capital. We want to fund this, but you need to show us a multi-year support service funding agreement from a provincial government to be able to say this is supportive housing and to be able to show us it's sustainable in the long term and have those kinds of money to pay caseworkers and people to come alongside the tenants." But this is very, very difficult to obtain in Ontario. All those service managers, they all have different budgets and different timelines and are usually quite hesitant to do multi-year commitments.

So just being able to see that kind of coordination—and we have seen this in other provinces. We're a national organization. In other provinces, we have been able to work with the provincial government, and they have been able to have this one-stop shop. Manitoba is a really good example, where they have one entry point where you can access pre-development capital funding, support service, rent supplements to make things rent-geared-to-income. We've accessed before there. So this is something that

seems to be possible for other provincial governments to be able to do.

I just want to close by saying that one thing, thinking we're on the budget committee here: There's real evidence in that we know what works. We know that housing first works. We know this is a real solution to seeing even cost savings elsewhere.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Really, the provincial government level is the area that really stands to save the most in investment in supportive housing. There are some studies that show—CMHA has done a study that says every $10 invested in supportive housing yields $21 in savings for health care, social services and justice.

So we're just coming to ask you to really consider these two things—that timely, accessible capital be first in, and a coordinated approach with capital funding for projects between support services and capital funding for supportive housing projects—because we can really work together to develop the kind of homes that we know that the citizens of Ontario need. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We'll now hear from the Council of Canadian Innovators.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: That's great. Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to participate. My name is Skaidra Puodžiūnas and I'm also joined by Claire and Iain in the gallery. Collectively, we represent the Council of Canadian Innovators, a national business association representing more than 175 of Canada's fastest-growing technology-intensive companies. More than half of CCI's members are proudly headquartered here in Ontario, employing more than 30,000 workers and contributing nearly $7 billion to Ontario's economy.

Ontario's enters 2027 with an opportunity to answer a fundamental question: Will we simply be a place where innovation happens or will we become a place where Canadian innovation is bought, scaled and owned? The question matters, because Ontario's economy is changing. Where economic strength was once measured largely through the production of physical goods and commodities, increasingly, value comes from intangible assets: data, patents, software, intellectual property. Today, intangible assets account for nearly 90% of the market value of S&P 500 companies. Who owns those technologies and who controls the data and infrastructure increasingly determines where economic value accumulates.

We need to ensure Canadian companies can commercialize their technologies, find customers and scale here at home and globally. And that's where government procurement comes in. Ontario's broader public sector spends approximately $30 billion annually on goods and services. Those purchasing decisions are increasingly influencing which companies grow and, by extension, what digital plumbing is used to deliver our public services.

Let's consider last week's Microsoft outage. For millions, the outage meant an inbox that wouldn't load or a meeting that couldn't be scheduled. But in Ontario, the impact went much further. In Temiskaming Shores, northern Ontario, the disruption significantly affected municipal operations, including information with emergency service providers, alongside school bus and transportation providers protecting our children. In downtown Toronto, just blocks away from here, one of Canada's busiest health care networks—Unity Health, with an average visit of 3,500 ambulatory visits and over 400 daily emergency visits—had to enact a code grey due to system failures.

The outage also disrupted universities and other organizations across Canada, illustrating how many services on the same foreign-owned digital plumbing were impacted.

This puts into question our province's sovereignty. When essential services depend on infrastructure controlled elsewhere—largely by US foreign nationals—we simply have less control. And this is where procurement comes in.

Government buying decisions over decades have helped create these dependencies. But every new contract can either reinforce them or help build domestic capacity and competition, and Ontario has companies capable of providing alternatives. What we need is Ontario to build the on-ramps for adoption.

Consider Identos, a Toronto-based company developing technology that secures data access for humans and their AI, including allowing citizens to manage sharing the use of their personal information. This is an interesting story, because Ontario, rather than prescribing a particular technology, actually started with a problem it needed to solve through a challenge statement. Identos responded and got the chance to build technology around a real public sector need. Ontario helped create the conditions for a Canadian company to solve a Canadian problem.

Today, Identos works with clients, including several Ontario health entities, other governments in Canada and governments around the world. Yet, it has never made a sale to the Ontario government itself, so it can't actually point to the province as a reference customer.

The issue isn't that Identos was owed a contract; it's that Ontario helped develop a promising solution without creating a clear path for wider adoption at home, including the credibility that comes from the province being a customer.

1520

I ask the committee: When a pilot succeeds with domestic companies, what happens next? In my conversations with Canadian CEOs, I hear a version of the same thing again and again. A pilot gives them the chance to prove their technology, but the real challenge is getting government to become an anchor customer, and it does far more than provide revenue. Government purchasing power can help our innovators grow into globally competitive companies and help keep jobs, IP and economic value here in our province.

So, CCI is calling for an innovation procurement stream in the next provincial budget, creating a competitive pathway from successful pilots to procurement opportunities and wider deployment. But we also need procurement

processes that invite competition: problem statements rather than overly prescriptive RFPs; early and often supply chain engagement; regularly reopened vendor lists; and evaluations that consider long-term value, not just upfront cost.

The timing is especially important. Ontario is developing an AI industrial strategy and beginning work on digital credentials. These are groundbreaking works. Decisions about standards, interoperability and, yes, procurement will help shape how these services work, whether Ontarians even trust them and who gets to build them. Canadian innovators should be at the table early and often helping shape those decisions and competing to deliver the solutions.

Chair, I'll close with this. I have the privilege of hearing directly from Canadian founders and CEOs who want to help solve the challenges facing our province. We don't have an innovation shortage; we have an adoption problem.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: The next budget is an opportunity to address it, create more customers for Canadian innovators strengthen domestic capacity and our sovereignty and give Ontario greater control over its economic and digital future.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation. That concludes the presentations.

We'll start the first round of questions with the third party and MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair, thanks to the four of you for being here today.

Skadaria, I wanted to just touch on some of the things you had mentioned in your statement, that Ontario helped Identos develop its technology, but they never purchased it, which I find really interesting. So, how would your proposed innovation procurement stream give companies a path from a successful pilot to then a fair competition to hopefully—or at least be able to—compete for procurement in Ontario?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: I normally don't correct my name. It's a mouthful, but think "hydra," say "Skaidra."

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. Yes.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: I put it on my business cards and my parents were like, "What are you doing?"

Look, I think it's reimagining the relationship that our governments have with domestic providers, considering them as partners, right? Again, I think what's so rich about this example is that Ontario provided the challenges, actually gave insight into the real applicability of the innovation. We're almost there, and so I think what would really help moving forward, again through a proposed innovation procurement stream, is bringing procurement teams along for the journey. It's up to government to kind of convene the right stakeholders on the buying side. You're almost there with providing that challenge statement. You're almost there by providing that rapport and ongoing opportunity for companies like Identos to contribute, but then it's also bringing those end buyers into the conversation. I think that multidisciplinary approach is really needed.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thanks. You had noted, and I've spoken about it many times, that we have some of the best talent in the world coming out of post-secondary institutions in Ontario at the University of Toronto, at Waterloo and so many other institutions in our province. We see some of them end up leaving and going somewhere else, but we see some of them start companies to solve sometimes very niche issues or sometimes bigger issues, whether it's in the public sector or whether it's in the private sector. We do some really good work here, but I agree with you that we're not meeting that moment.

So, talking about procurement still and Buy Ontario, what is one rule you think the province should change to give smaller Ontario tech companies—maybe that early-stage start-up or that they've just started to go into the market—a better shot to compete? What would you suggest is changed first?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Again, thinking about the RFP experience, it's quite cumbersome. I think it's really just, again, describing the problems and outcomes that government needs. Instead of having it feel like a checklist, it's really about if you have the capabilities to partner on this problem: Can you actually show us how you would solve the problem, how you would build trust, continuous improvement in delivery, once the problem is "starting to be solved for"? I think that really helps kind of move beyond what we often see as a favouritism for incumbents, particularly in a technology space.

I would also add that it's really important for Canadian companies to shape the actual standards which the government will be using to actually value their procurements. Otherwise, they're beholden to standards that they're not creating, and then that creates a further possible redundancy on a very few handful of vendors.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: So you had mentioned—and I think we all experienced it in some ways. I did see some memes online where some people who may have been working in offices were happy that the Microsoft outage occurred because they didn't have to deal with their email.

But you raise a very serious issue: how it has impacted hospitals, how it has impacted emergency services and things that we really rely on, that we count on every single day. So no digital system is immune, even the biggest in the world—Microsoft, one of the biggest in the world.

So we find ourselves, whether it's in school boards, hospitals, here in the Legislature or wherever—in the government—where we end up getting locked into a single supplier to buy digital services. How can we kind of avoid that as a province? What should we be doing to, so to say, spread our chips around a little bit?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Again, I think it really comes down to thinking about the opportunity for standard creation, thinking about open systems, how they connect with each other. What are the opportunities to imagine our reliance on something as control and access, and are there

other opportunities for other companies and other partners to come and service that control or provide that access as backup or as diversifying our supply chains? It's integral. We're in a very messy, geopolitically complicated world, so really thinking about that at the onset and continuously is just absolutely essential.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, and I'll leave that there, Chair.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'll just follow up on that. With respect to what my colleague was asking, say there was a technology working in one Ontario hospital. What evidence would you need to justify rolling it out across the entire health network?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: I actually want to give credit to the Ontario government. Right now, there's a health innovation pathway that was announced in the last budget. It's a really, really great example of how we could actually enable health innovation that has—it's commercializing success. They're already proving themselves from an end-user perspective. It also helps companies get out of either getting into pilot purgatory, as we call it, or this challenge of reimbursement.

So I think health innovation or, just broadly, innovation procurement pathways allow for something that's working well in one hospital to then go over to the other one because we're all servicing the same patients; we're servicing people of this province or of this country. I think what it really just makes us think about is, as we're trying to remove interprovincial trade barriers, that this is a trade barrier: not seeing the value of one procurement in one hospital actually bleed into another one. So I think programs like CAN Health—we're big fans of them and want to partner more with them—are really just trying to take the risk out of taking innovation here and working on it here because, ultimately, it's also building efficiencies and greater connectivity. Again, I think it's really a salient example of removing interprovincial trade barriers.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: And if a local supplier came in at a higher upfront price, what would justify us actually moving forward with that person or that company?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Value—I mean the end value, the community value, the community investment. Yes, it's about job creation, of course. That's an important metric. But it's also about the kinds of jobs that we're creating.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: When big vendors come into Ontario and offer their services, oftentimes they also have the capacity to run 15 to 20 junior staff on an RFP. A small Ontario business simply can't do that. That said, an Ontario or Canadian business commitment to this country is immense. They're residents here; they're citizens here; they're taxpayers here. So I think really thinking about it from a holistic social value add-on is extremely important as we're building resilient systems.

1530

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: How much time, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): You have 27 seconds.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Okay, I'll just quickly say thank you to all our presenters, and when I look at Marie and Nadège this afternoon, I think we should be excited for our future. Two intelligent young women who are here representing their peers, and they should not be paying the price for government mismanagement or oversight issues. Thank you for being here today.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question is for Ms. Skaidra. Thank you very much for the presentation. I really appreciated that. I think that we have to make sure that Ontario has the innovative and innovation capability because that's the only way we can be on top of the technology and everything that's going on.

Our government has invested in protecting and commercializing homegrown innovation through Intellectual Property Ontario, IPON, while continuing to support emerging sectors such as fusion energy, artificial intelligence and critical technologies. How do these investments strengthen Ontario's innovation ecosystem and help ensure that discoveries made in Ontario translate into companies, jobs and economic growth here at home?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Thank you for raising that. We're big fans of IPON. We actually just signed an official agreement with IPON last week.

When we think about how technology works and how the value of technology is extracted, it's often by collecting rents, and so those who actually own the technology and are able to really realize the power of their intellectual property and patents are the most successful. Arguably, those supports that actually come from government that offset, for example, the cost of getting the best patent lawyer to figure out your IP game as early as possible pay dividends in the success and growth of a company.

I think it starts with really investing in both IP education—also ensuring that this education is not just in the province of Ontario. I'm also commending the province for working with counterparts across the country and also federally, because I really do think we have to get our shit together on a national level when it comes to IP—sorry for swearing. When we see successful companies commercializing and expanding, so much of it is about ownership and ownership of the right kinds of assets and so—yes, doubling down on the importance of that.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much. You are aware that the government and many of the universities have applied and get grants to create incubators to make sure that small start-ups can have access to expensive labs and expensive equipment which they might not be able to have access to because it's very costly. Now it's available in many of the universities across Ontario to help those small companies get some time sharing and they get ahead with their investments.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Yes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Allsopp.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you all for being here today. We really appreciate you taking the time to participate in our pre-budget consultations.

My question is for Leslie Bellingham from Raising the Roof. I want to say that your presentation really struck a chord with me. Throughout my career, I've been the treasurer for the Enrichment Centre for Mental Health in my local area, as well as a committee member on the community and human services committee with Hastings county, one of the service managers throughout the province of Ontario. I think you identified a number of issues that I've certainly experienced throughout my career.

As you know, we put forward about $700 million a year through the Homelessness Prevention Program, which is then distributed. What do you think the impact of those funds is, and how would you better tailor that program to derive more impact from that money?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: I found it difficult to access. We haven't accessed it for any of our existing operational buildings so far. It's because of that service manager model. When we typically are looking for support services funding, we will go to one of the service managers and say, "This is our project. This is our target population. Is there anything available?"

It's not clear to us how we would access that money if it's not offered in that meeting. There's usually no public procurement policy, there's no RFP offered to apply for it or anything like that.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: It's usually quite gatekept. It's like you talk to a person who works at the service manager office and if they don't offer to say, "Hey, we have this funding available, it could go to a project like yours," then there's really no way of accessing it.

I think having a very transparent way of accessing it, making this publicly known—what programs are offered, how a service agency would apply for this, making that very obvious and having it be a public transparent process.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you, Chair. I know we only have about 30-something seconds left.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): You have nine, eight, seven—

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you all very much for coming. That will conclude my questions.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm Jessica Bell. I'm the MPP for University–Rosedale. Thanks so much for coming in.

My first question is about OSAP. I've been really shocked over the last few weeks hearing about these bad-actor private career colleges defrauding the OSAP system while the Conservative government has looked the other way—happy to take donations from these executives, but certainly looking the other way when there's been tipoff after tipoff concerned about the fraud.

Then at the same time access to OSAP has really been restricted. It's been turned from mostly a grant program into a loan program, and now all these students that are going to private career colleges—good private career colleges—are suddenly finding they can't access OSAP at all. I thought it was really pertinent that you made that statement, students did not create this problem. They shouldn't have to pay for it. My question to you is, how can the government fix this mess?

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: As I mentioned before, I think students would really appreciate going back to the model where there was a higher grant percentage, as opposed to loans. Previously a student received through OSAP $1,000; $850 they wouldn't have to pay back. So $250 was much, much less compared to the $750 that they're now going to have to pay back. When you're looking at that at a scale of tuition over the course of two years, four years, a lot of students are considering not going to school in the first place and not acquiring these skills. It's a travesty.

As a student, I love going to school and just beyond the love of going to school, people in the province of Ontario need these educated workers. When you say, what can the government do to support these students? I think it's pretty clear that students—all the students that I've talked to—would really appreciate returning to the 2018 model, with the 25% loans and 85% grants.

I think students would also like to be protected and would like to feel cared for, and we would like to feel listened to, which is not something that is currently happening. Student protests are happening all over Ontario and we just don't really see much response. It's hard to feel encouraged by the government if there is no conversation and there is no dialogue and people don't reach out to us to ask us what they can do to support us. I think it just leaves students feeling really isolated.

Ms. Jessica Bell: How much does it typically cost to go to university when you factor in tuition and housing costs for a four-year degree? What are you going to pay?

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: It depends what degree you're getting—

Ms. Jessica Bell: A range.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: —but let's look at like a social science degree. It's probably $8,000 a year for tuition. Currently in Toronto housing for students is about $1,600—it's the highest national average, I believe. That does, of course, vary, but we're not looking at much less than $40,000. And that's just for housing and tuition alone, let alone groceries, the cost of transportation and the cost of living. We're students, we still want to have fun with our friends and we want to enjoy our time going to university and not have to consider whether we should take on an additional job or join a club. So, yes, $40,000.

Ms. Jessica Bell: It feels like a betrayal when the government should be helping you get ahead.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Definitely.

Ms. Jessica Bell: I have another question. This is related to Raising the Roof. I was listening very carefully to what you were saying around the need for a one-stop shop, more funding for supportive housing. I think this is really important. In my riding, a downtown Toronto riding, homelessness is a huge issue. People walk down the street. People are living in tents. No one wants people living in tents. Everyone wants people to be living in a home. That's certainly the goal.

1540

When I look at the fall economic statement, I see there's no new money for housing: no new money for affordable housing, no new money for supportive housing. Give us an understanding of the numbers here. How much would cost for the provincial government to provide that support to one supportive home, and how much should the provincial government be investing to build supportive housing at scale, meaning, we're building enough to meet the need?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Those are two very different questions—and what's needed for one supportive housing project, say, on an ongoing support services basis? It really, of course, depends on the scale of the size of the building and the scale of the support services being offered. This varies wildly from a caseworker stopping in once a week and having off-site support services, which is not very costly at all but can also be very effective, to on-site, 24/7 support services with a full caseworker team.

To give you some real numbers, just maybe on that higher end, on a project we just completed in Winnipeg: That one has on-site, 24/7 support services—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Why don't I let you just continue that thought? How's that?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Thank you. Basically, with 24/7 support services for 23 units of housing, that costs $522,000 a year in support services funding. That's the high end for a project of that size. I don't have the figures right in front of me for the exact number of housing units that we would need in Ontario to be able to meet the need, but as we know, it is very, very significant and really would take away from some of the other emergency services and shelters that are currently overrun with people.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you, Leslie. I appreciate the work Raising the Roof is doing. You raised an interesting idea: flexible, timely capital at the start. Through your experience, do you find that Ontario is probably one of the last provinces to enter into these agreements with the federal government, whether it's matching funding or providing operating funding? What's been your observation so far?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: I think it may be the last province, or it's definitely one of the last provinces, especially with the new Build Canada Homes and being able to enter into an agreement with that, for sure it is.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Yes, because about a year ago or so, the federal government announced a billion dollars in funding for supportive and transitional housing. This is before the federal budget that was just dropped last week, and we've yet to see an operating agreement with the province on funding those supportive and transitional units. I know you're talking about kind of a broader scale of housing, not just that.

So I think it's something that is well taken, at least by some here in this building. It's my sincere hope that we'll see action on that soon because we're going into another winter and it takes time to build buildings; it takes time to purchase buildings and do the renovations and the work that you're doing. Thank you very much for that.

I want to thank our friends from the University of Toronto Students' Union. When I was in university, about 15 years ago when I graduated, my friends and I were graduating with about $15,000, $20,000, $30,000, $40,000 in debt. Do you think with these changes the province has made that we're going to go back to that?

Ms. Marie Kinderman: I guess I would agree with your answer because just burdening students with debt is not a solution. What I would add to that is that we're asking for students to be able to participate in consultation on these decisions. We haven't been consulted at many levels, and that's just the bare minimum that we ask for before just pulling the rug out from under us. It's not fair to us.

We're not people who have careers over multiple decades. We're just trying to get our start. And I would add—maybe this isn't directly related to your question—that OSAP is only one piece of the puzzle. We're just looking at the rising cost of living across the board. Why don't we add to this conversation? We need to fully fund our transportation system, we need to fully fund housing, and all of this fits into the larger picture. We can't just look at OSAP and ignore all of these other things. The government should be investing at every level in people's lives.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you. I think we're very much going to go back down that road. It seems to me—and I think you probably agree, but I don't want to put words in your mouth: Do you think the government is trying to have students graduate with more debt?

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Well, it seems that that is going to be the result of the actions taken. Whether that was the intent, that is going to be the outcome.

As Marie was saying, and I echo, it's frustrating to have to make these requests and talk about what will happen and what the consequences will be now that the consequences are already starting to affect students, rather than before any changes are made to the OSAP.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Why weren't we talked to? We've been constantly trying to get our voices heard, and it has just not done anything.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think students need to be part of that decision-making process, or at least consulted, because we look at the decisions that were made: We saw massive growth in OSAP go towards private career colleges—and I do believe they serve a purpose in some ways, but there was obviously fraud, there was obviously abuse, and the government was warned about it and they didn't do anything.

So I guess my question is, if you were warned about something two years ago, maybe at the UTSU, would you have done something about it right away or would you wait two years?

Ms. Marie Kinderman: We would have to do something right away because the university would look at us

and say, "Hey, you don't have responsible governance." Why is it that we're held to higher standards than them? It doesn't make any sense.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you.

We'll go to MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'll go back to Leslie. You've described projects getting stuck because housing capital and support service funding depend on each other. And I understand things might look a little different here in Ontario because you're dealing with 47 different service providers, all with different people responsible for the priorities, all under the same provincial mandate but operating in this patchwork approach.

Is there something that we could do in the spring budget? What is the one thing that we could do to actually break that impasse? And what should all of us around this table be taking away from your experience delivering supportive housing in Manitoba, as you were explaining earlier?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Like I said in the presentation, I think that being able to go first is really what is needed. It could be from the support services funding: being willing to actually make even conditional agreements that say, "If you did get the federal capital funding, then we would have this multi-year support services funding agreement," actually having a mechanism to do that, which I don't think really exists right now, but having funds available that could be to go towards projects like that—the same thing with the capital, too.

I think that's the reason why, when I talk to people, say, at Build Canada Homes, like we were talking about earlier, we're one of the last provinces to have that agreement. I think it's because the Ontario government hasn't had dedicated capital towards capital projects that are for affordable and supportive housing, so there isn't a mechanism for that. So if the federal government is saying, "We will not fund projects without provincial commitment," then there needs to be that provincial commitment first, right?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: So then it just ends in this endless limbo.

We've seen this in other provinces, too, where we've worked, where we're ready, we have a project, we have it all ready to go, but no one will go first, so it gets stuck.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Back to Marie and Nadège: I just want to touch on something. You guys said 63.9% of students make less than $10,000 a year. I recently wrote about the OSAP fiasco, and I was shocked at some of the comments online about, "Hey kids, just go get a job." What would you guys say to that?

Ms. Nadège Jackiw: Try two or three or four jobs—around me, as a student union leader, I hear people come up and they're asking for jobs. They're asking their student union leaders to provide them with jobs because they just can't do it with the part-time jobs that they have. I know students who are working—both Marie and I work full-time jobs while staying enrolled in school, and so many students around us are doing that as well. It's not just "try and get one job"; it's "get many."

1550

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): That concludes the time.

MPP Racinsky.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: Thank you to all the presenters for coming this afternoon.

I just want to start with a comment to Leslie with Raising the Roof. I was actually at a presentation done by Raising the Roof at AMO a few years ago—really interesting. You do important work; thank you for doing that. I really appreciated your comments about the 47 service managers. I think there is definitely a need to take a look at that. I was previously the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Red Tape Reduction, and as a government, we're always looking for a one-stop shop, that sort of thing, so thank you for mentioning the Manitoba model. We'll take a look at that. Obviously, Manitoba is a much smaller province and so there's differences there. But we've made tremendous investments—as my colleague from Bay of Quinte said, $700 million—but we need to make sure that we're seeing the impact from that investment, so thanks for your comments.

I'm going to ask my question to Skaidra of the Council of Canadian Innovators. Thank you for being here. I want to ask you about a particular investment our government made: $30 million in the Vector Institute and also renewed funding through its critical technologies initiative to accelerate the adoption of AI and other advanced technologies across the economy.

How important are these investments in helping Ontario's homegrown innovators that you represent scale globally, increase productivity and create the high-quality jobs of the future?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Maybe I'll take the question on a broader level. I would say that the Ontario government's investment in Ontario companies, particularly high-growth or emerging technology companies, is absolutely supported and valued. I just think that sometimes governments get into the trap of what we call the "peanut butter and jelly effect," where we give a little bit here, a little bit here, a little bit here, and really, why we emerged as a coalition is to service the scaling technology companies that are past the start-up phase and going into a different era of growth.

I think the Ontario government could do a lot more to service that middle layer of SME support, so I think initiatives like the critical technology investment is on the right track and we're really supportive of it, but I think there's also a lot more than just investment; there's a different kind of support and, frankly, a concierge approach to some of the procurement systems if we want these companies to actually stay in Ontario and this country.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I know this is a bit of a controversial question, but AI: As I mentioned in my question, what kind of impact are you seeing with that—the opportunities that your members seeing through AI?

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: No, I don't think it's controversial at all; I think it's a very important question, and I think where a lot of our companies are seeing opportunities are in regulated industries—thinking about mining, thinking about certain segments of health care. Again, it's thinking about what kind of AI is suitable for your organization. We don't all need to have the most sophisticated model and the highest GPU; in fact, I would argue that there's a very, very small segment of our population that perhaps needs that kind of access and support.

But I think the real impetus and drive for AI is to make our lives more freeing and accessible, and I think there's some really great use cases that we're just not thinking about because I think there's just a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding. We would be happy to connect more Canadian companies that have some really great ideas, even around governance too, and transparency, and just really thinking about it from a very systematic and very highly trustworthy and transparent way.

Mr. Joseph Racinsky: I agree. Thank you for that. I'm really pleased our government created the ministry of AI adoption; I think there's going to be lots of exciting work there to see the opportunities that we can seize from it. Thanks for your comments today.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Smith.

Mr. Dave Smith: How much time do we have left?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): You have 1.4.

Mr. Dave Smith: Thank you.

I've been on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for six of my eight years as an MPP. Just a little history on things: During the 2024 budget deliberations, our budget was $202 billion; we had $655 billion in additional funding requests. In 2025, the budget was $218 billion; we had $570 billion in additional funding requests. This year, the budget is $232 billion. I'm guessing we'll probably have $500 billion or $600 billion in new funding requests for it, so there are a lot of constraints that get put on us.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Dave Smith: I want to go to Raising the Roof first. You mentioned service providers as being one of the challenges. Is there a non-monetary change that we could make that would actually make it better or easier for you to get access to the type of funding that you need? Because it seems, from what you're saying, that it's a closed shop, and it's really difficult to get the service providers to open up that funding for innovative approaches.

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Yes, exactly. Having it be open and transparent, for sure, this is a way.

And I think that there is money that the provincial government puts into both capital funding for supportive and affordable housing and for support services. This money is available, but it's not very accessible, and it's not very aligned. So I think that it's not necessarily even more dollars; it's how it's being used. If you're going to fund on a capital basis—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much, and it's wonderful to hear your presentations.

My first question is going to Leslie, at Raising the Roof. Leslie, the province of Ontario—the government, I should say—had set out a plan to build 1.5 million new homes over a 10-year period. We're four years out to the target deadline and significantly off target. In 2025, only 58% of that target was met for that year.

So, as you describe how opportunities may be missed even further because of the provincial government not being at the table early with funding to match federal dollars, is there any concern that we continue to miss this target, but more specifically, how much money will we leave on the table by not being there, first up to bat?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: I don't know the figures on what it would be, but it's definitely significant, because I think that's why—I'm not going to speak to all market housing. I know that that commitment to housing is across the entire—but definitely, for the kind of projects I'm talking about, to make it pencilled, there needs to be this grant and non-repayable capital in it.

But there's just delay after delay, and it's going back and forth for months and months, and then opportunities are lost. It's real estate, so properties are not available; they got sold to someone else, and they're being developed for an entirely different purpose—not necessarily housing at all and definitely not affordable housing. So I think that every time there's a delay and there isn't capital being put into this, it's just putting it farther down the road, and we're seeing more and more people enter homelessness.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you.

A very quick follow-up question: For those who are living in chronic homelessness in the city of Toronto, I believe the wait-list for supportive housing is almost 20,000 persons deep. So we certainly don't have enough supportive housing, and these are the types of homes that will enable somewhat independent living, semi-independent living.

So people who are sleeping rough or perhaps under a bridge or in the parks, in the encampments, that lend to the perception of a diminishing public safety—if Ontario is not there with the operating dollars that generally come from the province for supportive housing, what happens to that wait-list? What happens to those who have been waiting? Is it just a matter of, they're out of luck until we get a new government or until this government decides that mental health supports and supportive housing are important?

Ms. Leslie Bellingham: Yes, it will continue to grow. And, like I said, there's going to be—people, say, who are sleeping rough, definitely need to be in those emergency services with really intensive wraparound supports, though there are many examples of really great success where people can be safely housed.

And then, we need this kind of next-stage housing, so we need to have it building all along the continuum to be able to have that people don't need to be sleeping under bridges. They can move into more appropriate places, into

shelters, and then be able to continue this. This is just going to be a growing problem.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much.

To Skaidra, from Council of Canadian Innovators, thank you for your deputation.

I'm curious to know, with respect to your comments around strategic public procurement as an economic driver—obviously, we want Canadian companies that start here, that accelerate here, to stay here. And without a strong procurement strategy that's purposeful, which will also lend to regional and I would say even national and international global competitiveness, how likely is it that we'll lose our start-up culture? There's a certain ecosystem that has been created, but if it doesn't come with public procurement strategies, is it likely to take flight?

1600

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: I don't have the stats on hand, but there has been an alarming trend of Canadian companies being started here and fleeing our country. It's not just the US but, of course, we're close to a very big buyer down south, so there is that push-and-pull effect.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Skaidra Puodžiūnas: Again, I think it's about that partnership, that co-creation and our public services. Wouldn't you want our public services to be delivered by those that will be impacted by them, that will be benefiting from them, that are invested in their continuity and their growth?

I will just say that a purchase order from a government does so much for a business and their trajectory. You look at big US technology companies; one of their first buyers were US governments. We should think about the power behind that purchasing power.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you.

The time check, Chair?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Two point five.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Minutes?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Seconds.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Then to the students from the University of Toronto Students' Union, thank you for your presentation. I'm sorry I didn't have time to ask you a question.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question and for this panel. Thank you all for the time you took to prepare and the able way you presented it to us. We very much appreciate it. I'm sure it will be beneficial as we move forward to write our report. Thanks again for being here.

ONTARIO LONG TERM CARE ASSOCIATION

WORKERS' ACTION CENTRE

CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Our next panel, I believe, is sitting in the audience. The next panel will be the Ontario Long Term Care Association, the Workers' Action Centre and the Canadian Cancer Society.

Interjections.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): If members of the committee want to chat with the people, would they please move beyond this room?

As we're gathering at the table, as was mentioned for the others, you have seven minutes for the presentation. At six minutes, I will give you notice that you have one minute left. Don't stop, because we're waiting for the punchline. We will then go for the questions from around the table.

We do ask that everybody, before they make their presentation, give us their name to make sure we can attribute the right person to the presentation.

In the first presentation, we'll start with the Ontario Long Term Care Association.

Ms. Donna Duncan: Sorry. I have a croaky throat today.

Thank you, Chair, members of the committee. I am Donna Duncan, CEO of the Ontario Long Term Care Association.

When we talk about long-term care, we talk about people, health, health care, home and community, but we also need to recognize that long-term-care homes are economic drivers in their communities. Ontario's 611 homes generate $14.1 billion in GDP every year. They support more than 180,000 jobs in the homes, at their suppliers and in local businesses. More than 46,000 of those jobs are in rural communities. Homes operate for at least the 30 years of their licence, and most for generations. In a time of economic uncertainty, these jobs stay. They are steady, local and growing.

We want to thank the province for its continued commitment to long-term care. Here's what Ontarians don't realize: The province's $6.4-billion capital commitment is actually unlocking $22 billion in sector investment to build and modernize. Operators finance the construction. They carry the debt and the risk through the build and the licence period. Provincial capital funding begins when the first resident moves in. Building those spaces also adds $32.8 billion to Ontario's GDP.

There has been real progress that the government has made: 168 projects open, under construction or approved to start and an average of four hours of direct care per resident per day achieved. It's progress worth protecting. Those investments are working, but they are not secure. The need is growing: 2027 will bring the fastest rate of growth in Ontario's senior population in recent history. By the end of next year, close to 10,000 additional seniors over 80 will need long-term care.

For budget 2027, our priorities are focused and practical. First, we need to keep care close to home. Most seniors want to stay in their homes and communities for as long as they can, and with the right support, the majority will. However, 20% will need more specialized long-term-care support that home and community care cannot provide. And that would avoid unnecessary and more expensive hospital admissions, in many cases outside of their communities.

A long-term-care home in a local community means round-the-clock, publicly funded nursing care, where

family members can still visit every day. In rural Ontario, that home nearby matters even more. There are 215 long-term-care homes in rural communities and often there is only a single home in the community providing health services.

Ontario also has 344 small homes that carry higher fixed costs that the current funding model does not recognize. We've long advocated for an annual operating grant to support our small homes.

Of the 200 older homes that are still working towards redevelopment, approximately 60% are small—128 spaces or fewer—and approximately 30% of those are rural. So we are asking for time-limited transition support so that older homes can stay open and stable until they redevelop, and an annual operating grant for small, rural and northern homes. Stable operating funding also gives lenders the confidence to finance redevelopment.

Second, funding for care that keeps pace with increased needs and real costs: Residents are moving into long-term care older, with more complex needs. Most are living with dementia, multiple chronic conditions or behavioural needs. At the same time, arbitrated wage settlements continue to rise. We're asking for level-of-care funding that keeps pace with the real cost of care and the flexibility for homes to direct it where residents need it. That's what protects the government's commitment to a provincial average of four hours of direct care per resident per day.

Third, the need to grow our workforce: By 2029, two years from now, Ontario will need more than 25,400 additional nurses and PSWs just to serve the new long-term-care homes coming online, and not factoring in attrition or other health system needs. The government's programs are working. In long-term care, someone can start as a dietary aid and grow into a nurse without ever leaving their community. So we're asking to make PREP LTC permanent, extend Living Classrooms and reinstate PSW student placement funding.

Fourth, we need to continue to invest in innovation and a culture of quality improvement in long-term care. Homes are adopting new models of care: emotion-focused dementia care, behavioural support and Community Access to Long-Term Care, which brings foot care, wound care, physiotherapy and other services to both seniors in long-term care and those still living at home in the community.

We're asking to expand dementia, behavioural and specialized care supports to bring Community Access to Long-Term Care to more homes, to continue technology investments and to foster a culture of quality that keeps accountability strong while helping homes learn and improve.

In summary, for budget 2027, we ask the government to:

—protect care close to home with time-limited transition support for older homes, and an annual operating grant for small, rural and northern homes;

—protect time for care, with level-of-care funding that keeps pace with increased costs and the flexibility to direct it to residents;

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Donna Duncan: —protect the people that provide the care by making PREP LTC permanent, extending Living Classrooms and reinstating PSW placement funding; and

—protect the innovation under way by expanding dementia, behavioural and specialized supports in Community Access to Long-Term Care.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much for the presentation.

We will now go to the Workers' Action Centre.

Ms. Deena Ladd: Good afternoon. My name is Deena Ladd, and I am the executive director of the Toronto Workers' Action Centre. We're a non-profit organization that works with thousands of non-union workers every year.

I don't think it would surprise anyone on this committee that people are dealing with a lot of issues around the affordability crisis right now. People are working paycheque to paycheque. As you can imagine, workers are thrown into an incredibly deep financial crisis when their wages are not paid.

1610

Wage theft is the number one issue that comes to our centre: not getting paid for all of their hours worked, no overtime pay, no vacation pay, no public holiday pay. These are all too common situations that we're dealing with. The wage theft crisis has, I think, become more dire due to a number of factors, including chronic underenforcement of our labour laws, our current cost of living crisis and the weakening of our social safety net. So we're calling on the Ontario government to invest in workers and our economy by stopping wage theft.

We are currently working with a group of nail salon workers that have all worked for a company called Nail Fix in the 6ix. We feel that this case clearly demonstrates the failures of Ontario's employment standards enforcement. Nine workers are currently waiting for almost $53,000 in unpaid wages. This is seven months after the Ontario Ministry of Labour ordered the company to pay. It's been over a year and a half since the business stopped paying workers what they're owed. Four more workers have recently contacted us who are owed an additional $38,000 in unpaid wages.

This nail salon uses a business model built on violating law because they know they can get away with it under this government. The nail salon misclassifies some of its employees as independent contractors to avoid paying for all the hours they've worked. It requires new employees, whom they call students, to pay up to $1,500 to be trained and fails to pay these workers while they're being trained. This can actually happen for months on end. One of the new workers we've met worked for three months, not getting a single pay. Tips are often withheld or not paid at all.

For the past year, the Ministry of Labour has known that this company continues to operate by stealing workers' wages as they issued orders to pay in February of this year to the nine workers, yet none of these workers have

been paid. For the past seven months, the Ministry of Finance has failed to enforce the orders to pay.

Orders to pay go unenforced. There have been no penalties or fines after nine ESA claims have confirmed wage violations in this company. The company continues to hire new workers who face wage theft, charge illegal fees and fail to pay employees during training.

Unfortunately, this story is not unusual. Wage theft is widespread.

Last year—and I believe you have copies of the report—we surveyed hundreds of workers across Ontario. What we found was absolutely shocking. Over 60% of workers surveyed had experienced at least one case of wage theft. Over half of the workers surveyed said they did not get paid for all the hours they worked; 46% of workers reported they don't get public holidays off with pay.

This government is clearly not using the tools at their disposal to hold employers that steal wages responsible for their actions. It has become easier for employers to steal workers' wages and get away with it since 2018.

When the first Nail Fix in the 6ix worker filed an ESA claim for unpaid wages, it should have triggered a full investigation. That would have protected all the other workers who were still working and also facing wage theft.

Under the current government, the use of proactive inspections has plummeted 87%, from 3,500 in 2019 to just 474 in 2025. The previous government had committed to hire more employment standards officers to inspect one in 10 Ontario workplaces. The current government cancelled that plan, and in 2024 there were only 115 employment standards offices, which is the same number there was in 2014, even though there's been an increase in the workforce.

When an employer does not voluntarily comply with the Ministry of Labour's orders to pay, it is the Ministry of Finance that is supposed to attempt to recover the wages from employers, but as we see from this case, that rarely happens. Between 2014 and 2023, the Ministry of Finance only recovered 22% of these cases, which means $80 million of workers' wages have not been collected. Because of the failure of the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Finance to enforce the law or collect stolen wages, there is no real cost if an employer commits wage theft.

The government has boasted in the press that it has increased the maximum penalty for the ESA violations to $100,000. That's amazing, but in the past five years, this maximum penalty has only been used once.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Deena Ladd: In any case, the government's overall use of fines and penalties for employers found guilty of wage theft has dropped by 85% since it came into power. Last year, there were only 37 tickets of $355 given to employers who broke the law and only 19 prosecutions for more serious violations.

When wage theft laws are not enforced, it gives financial advantage to employers who steal our wages and pressures other companies to commit wage theft. This lowers wages and working conditions for all. The government's 2027 budget must change directions on wage theft. Resources and commitment are needed to stop employers from stealing workers' wages. We need to provide adequate resources to enforce the ESA that basically provide a real minimum floor of standards.

We would like the government to recommit to hiring employment standards officers to bring the staffing up to 415 employment standards officers and commit to proactively investigating—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you. That concludes the time.

We now go to the Canadian Cancer Society, and we have one virtual—on the screen—for this presentation. With that, the floor is yours, Cancer Society.

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. I'm Hillary Buchan-Terrell, the Ontario advocacy manager at the Canadian Cancer Society. Thank you for the opportunity to present today alongside my colleague Daniel Nowoselski.

Our pre-budget submission rests on one idea: Ontario can reduce the cost of cancer while improving access, capacity and outcomes. Each recommendation is a targeted, practical step that reduces avoidable downstream costs like hospital pressure, late-stage treatment and lost caregiver productivity. There are tangible measures we expect provinces to champion as Canada works to meet its G7 cancer commitments. That is why we continue to urge the federal government to strengthen the Canada health transfers in Ontario to lead in making that case.

Improved federal funding could help unlock the investments we're asking Ontario to make today. I'll focus on three for my remarks: take-home cancer drugs, PSA testing and support for caregivers.

Our first issue, take-home cancer drugs, is one we have raised with this committee for years. CCS and many other cancer organizations are committed to this recommendation because patients still face the same barriers after more than a decade of inaction and an overlooked 2022 budget commitment. They deserve a solution.

More than half of new cancer treatments are now oral, yet in Ontario, patients taking these drugs at home can face private insurance requirements, thousands in deductibles and copayments, and paperwork that does not apply to comparable treatments given in hospital or to patients in other provinces, other than Atlantic Canada.

Under the Trillium Drug Program, a household generally pays a deductible of about 4% of its household income before coverage begins and first has to prove that income through tax documents, applications, waiting for approval, all during their cancer diagnosis. Patients treated in hospital and in most of the rest of Canada never face this.

We celebrate the progress the government has made with the FAST program launched in October 2025. Getting drugs onto the formulary faster is well intentioned, but it will fall short unless we also address the last and most important leg of the journey: how these drugs actually

reach patients. Of the nine cancer drugs now approved through FAST, seven are take-home cancer drugs.

Take breast cancer, for example. Itovebi, or inavolisib, was the first breast cancer treatment funded through FAST for a specific type of advanced breast cancer. Patients take it at home with a second pill, palbociclib, and only the fulvestrant injection is given at the clinic. So even with the faster listing, most of their treatment can still come with deductibles and paperwork they would not face in hospital.

That is why we are calling on the government of Ontario to move forward to automatic, universal public coverage of take-home cancer drugs. No one facing cancer in Ontario should have to worry about paying out of pocket for these drugs or navigating the paperwork to get them. Closing this gap would improve patient outcomes and save the government money through less red tape and greater health system capacity. People with cancer can't afford to wait. It's time to end Ontario's patchwork system of drug access.

Access to treatment matters, and so does finding cancer early. Advances in prostate cancer diagnosis have changed the picture. Prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, tests no longer lead straight to biopsy. Tools like a multiparametric MRI, a better understanding of individual risk and shared decision-making between a patient and doctor let us find the cancer earlier while avoiding unnecessary procedures. It's a simple blood test, no different than a cholesterol check, and that starts this pathway that can find the cancer early or in pre-cancer stages, when it is easier to treat and survival is much more likely. Yet Ontario is one of only two provinces that do not cover the cost of a PSA test for men with a physician referral.

1620

Modern research and best practices have created an environment completely different than in 2014, the last time Canada updated its prostate cancer guidelines. Past concerns about over-diagnosis and false positives were valid, but they are no longer universal, and the cost of closing this gap is modest. PDCI Market Access modelled this for CCI and put it at roughly $3 million a year, which is a 2021 estimate that may be somewhat higher today, but it remains very small relative to the overall health budget.

This September, during Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, CCS and seven other organizations—including Movember, the Canadian Urological Association, Walnut Foundation, PROCURE, Prostate Cancer Foundation Canada, the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology, and the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine—co-signed an open letter asking the new advisory committee on preventative health services to prioritize a review of our national prostate cancer guidance.

We are optimistic they'll recognize the need, but a lack of federal action is not an excuse to cede action here in Ontario. It certainly wasn't for breast cancer screening. The American Cancer Society recently updated its guidelines to call for the biannual PSA screening for men at average risk and annual screening for men at high risk. We're not asking Ontario to even go that far this time, but it shows that Canada is increasingly falling behind modern best practices.

This disease will cause 29,300 Canadian men to hear the words "You have cancer" this year, and it will kill another 1,900 in 2026. A PSA test can help more Ontario men avoid being counted in either of those statistics.

Over to my colleague Daniel.

Mr. Daniel Nowoselski: The final issue we'd like to raise with you as a consideration for budget 2027 is on caregiver financial distress.

In December 2024, we at the Canadian Cancer Society published our report on the economic impact of cancer in Canada. This report found that people with cancer and their loved ones shoulder about 20% of the cost of diagnosis. That means people with cancer and their caregivers end up spending up to $33,000 on average over the course of their lifetime as a result of a cancer diagnosis. This includes the direct out-of-pocket costs like transportation and parking, medications and equipment, and the indirect costs like lost earnings.

This isn't just an issue that impacts people with cancer; it's an issue for our economy. Caregivers across Canada spend 5.7 billion hours each year providing care and contribute an equivalent of 4.2% to our GDP in the labour they provide. For context, that is more than the transportation and warehousing sector or the information and cultural sector contributed to Ontario's GDP in 2025.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Daniel Nowoselski: But often for working-age caregivers, that comes with a cost to their careers. The 2025 Ontario Caregiver Organization spotlight report found 18% of caregivers took a break from their job to manage their caregiving responsibilities, 16% reduced their hours for work, 9% lost some or all of their employment benefits, 3% were fired or laid off and 5% quit their jobs to manage their responsibilities

We urge the Ontario government to consider adopting measures that would address this financial impact. This can include an allowance like we see in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, or making the existing supports more accessible, like making the Ontario Caregiver Tax Credit refundable, as it is in Quebec and Manitoba and as the federal government has committed to do in their budget 2026.

Thank you very much, and we look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the presentations.

We now will start the first round of questions with MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Thank you to all of our presenters this afternoon.

Donna, I'll start with you. I represent a rural riding where we are struggling with both a shortage of long-term-care beds and a home care system that is simply not meeting the needs of our residents. And I worry that, as government, we're treating these as two separate issues when they're very much interconnected. When people cannot access adequate home care, we know that their

health deteriorates, family caregivers reach that breaking point, and people end up needing long-term care sooner rather than later.

Does your association believe we are creating additional pressure on our long-term-care system by underinvesting in home care?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We would argue we need to do it all; it's not an either/or. As we're looking at the aging demographic, we have to make sure that home care is there.

One of the things that Minister Kusendova-Bashta and the government is moving on is something called Community Access to Long-Term Care. I was with the minister on Friday in Ailsa Craig where we opened a hub that actually has new long-term-care spaces in a very rural community that also incorporated a seniors active living centre, access to memory care, day programming, and has the opportunity to embed home care clinics.

We know home care is really challenged in rural communities: How do we work together, recognizing and including that HR overlay? We're all fishing from the same pool. Trying to get human resources and PSWs in rural communities—nurses and RPNs—is very, very difficult. Our discussions with our home care partners are, how can we be more collaborative? And how can we, in rural communities, build out community-based solutions that are actually going to meet the unique needs of a rural community where we know those long-term-care homes become more important, but keeping people in their communities?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Also, we know that the waitlist is 50,000 people long. In my riding I have a long-term-care home, Edgewater Gardens. It was slated for expansion—or it was given the go-ahead in March 2021. In October 2024, they indefinitely paused the expansion due to lack of provincial funding because costs had escalated between 2021 and 2024.

Is this an isolated incident, or are we seeing communities having a tough time getting shovels in the ground to complete these projects?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We know you were successfully getting one peopleCare home built in one part of your riding, but, from my remarks, we know that homes of 128 spaces or fewer are very, very difficult to build, especially in smaller communities. The economics are really challenging. So we are working closely with the government to find a solution. These are the small homes, largely rural homes. So how do we—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time.

We now will go to MPP Allsopp.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to all three presenters for being here and certainly the gentleman who's available online as well. Thank you for being here.

My question is to Donna Duncan. When I first arrived in Queen's Park, I became the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Long-Term Care and got to spend a lot of time travelling around the province talking to people, both the residents in long-term care and their families.

The two things that really jumped out for me: One was the improved access to long-term care. Obviously, there was a period of time from about 2011 to 2018 where only about 611 new beds got built in the province of Ontario. And so the expansion that we've undertaken has certainly been welcomed, I think, by a lot of residents and their families because the access has improved. But then the other piece is the actual direct hours of care have increased significantly as well. Our government provides about an additional $139.4 million to the sector, $44.1 million for direct hours of care.

From your perspective, how have those investments been landing, and what can you say about the increase in the direct hours of care that we're now offering in our long-term-care homes?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We've certainly seen an increase in the needs of our residents, so the additional hours of care really matter. It certainly gives residents and families more confidence. It certainly makes our staff feel better supported.

I would say this government has actually done more than anybody in response to the pandemic. And so these investments in the renewal of the beds, plus the four hours of care and new models of care—it's a package that is really having a huge impact to strengthen our system.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you, and I want to thank you for being here today. I can tell, obviously, you've got a bit of a sore throat, and I'll hopefully not ask you any questions that require very long answers of you.

But the next piece that you did talk about is the Community Access to Long-Term Care pilot that we've launched and how that program has been allowing community members to access long-term care, to keep people in their homes longer, to be able to access some of the programming that exists in our long-term-care homes. Can you talk about the benefits that you're seeing in the community from that program?

Ms. Donna Duncan: It makes it much easier, especially in rural communities. We're really seeing the new pilots having an impact in rural communities and in urban centres as well. It makes the long-term-care home a hub. We already know it's an economic centre. People who can come into the community to access care and services makes us use HR better. It normalizes long-term care. Long-term care is not a scary place to come into anymore, and more eyes in long-term care makes it safer, too. We're seeing the community really value it.

In Ailsa Craig, the entire community came out for the ground opening, and there was a real sense of pride. It becomes a community centre, and not this scary box where old people go. It really is more about living and bringing more vitality and innovation into our long-term care homes.

1630

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Well, thank you. Certainly this is an issue that's incredibly important to me, because in my riding, in Bay of Quinte, two of our communities are about five years older than the provincial average, and we've

long been a key retirement destination across the province. But Prince Edward county is about 16 years older than the provincial average, and so a significant need for long-term care. We've got a number of projects going on right now.

But the final question I wanted to ask you is about cultural long-term-care homes and the need for culturally appropriate care, particularly as people age, perhaps reverting back to their native languages and things of that nature. What can you tell us about the effectiveness of that program?

Ms. Donna Duncan: Well, again, this is an area where our minister is leading and Ontario is leading across Canada, in really building out new long-term-care homes for our cultural communities, including our First Nations communities.

How do we make sure that we find it works? With the wait-list growing, finding a way to protect those spaces, knowing that cultural homes fundraise—you want to have the same kind of food. If someone's admitted into a Chinese home like Yee Hong, Yee Hong serves Chinese food. So we have to appreciate that even for others coming into a long-term-care home that isn't a cultural home, it's not going to be as comfortable.

Building these new homes, making sure they're sustainable—they're largely non-profit homes, and we're very proud to call a majority of homes cultural homes among our members. So we're making progress. The pilot is not a pilot anymore, and I think through perseverance we're going to get there.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Tyler Allsopp: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): MPP Pierre.

Ms. Natalie Pierre: I'll be quick. My question is for Hillary, and it's around the importance of early screening for cancer. In 2024, our government announced changes to the breast cancer screening, lowered the age to start screening from 50 to 40 and then, most recently, expanded the colorectal cancer screening eligibility to people aged 45 and older, giving more than a million additional Ontarians access to these screening services.

So I just wanted to ask you: How important, in your opinion, is early screening to improving survival rates for cancer?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: Absolutely, and I think what I'll speak to today—and certainly, we congratulate those moves by the government. We were certainly applauding those moves—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): I think we'll have to save that until the next round.

We now go to MPP Bell.

Ms. Jessica Bell: My first question is to the representatives from the Canadian Cancer Society. I want to talk a little bit about out-of-country cancer treatment. We've had numerous stories being shared in the Legislature. One includes the experience of Sabrina Apitz-Grossman. She's 31. She has a rare and aggressive cancer. Her oncologist recommended a potentially life-saving treatment in the United States, but the province has refused to fund it.

And that's common. We're seeing a lot of advancements in cancer care and cancer treatment, and I think a lot of people are looking to other countries and saying, "Well, if it's available there, why can't we access it here?"

What do you think the Ontario government's approach should be to helping Ontarians get access to these life-saving treatments?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: Absolutely. It's certainly an issue that we've been following closely. I think Canadian Cancer Society's overall view is that Canadians should have timely and equitable access to cancer drugs that can meaningfully improve their outcomes. So the innovation that we see in cancer drugs—as I mentioned with take-home cancer drugs, it really only benefits the patients if it can get to them.

While governments ensure that access to new cancer drugs is sustainable over the long term—of course, that's important—we know that those rising drug costs can really put pressure on the public health systems. The answer is not only just limiting that patient access, but we need to make sure that the solutions deliver both access and value. So we need to do all that we can to bring innovations—including take-home cancer drugs through the FAST program, for example—to the patients and bring them to Canada first.

All parts of the system have a role to play, from Health Canada to the health technology assessment bodies in the provinces, through pan-Canadian price negotiations, to provinces and territories making the final funding decisions. CCS is calling for these processes to be streamlined, while maintaining rigorous standards for safety, efficacy and quality.

Governments can also make Canada a more attractive place to launch critical clinical cancer trials and ensure earlier access to promising new therapies while strengthening our position as a global leader here.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for that answer. The Ontario NDP is very much in support of including take-home cancer drugs as part of the drug formulary so people don't have to worry about money; they just need to focus on beating cancer. So thank you for that.

My second question is to Deena Ladd from the Workers' Action Centre. Thank you so much for coming here. This is a very thorough, important report. I appreciate it.

I was also really shocked by the experience you gave around the situation with the nail workers and how that's emblematic of what's happening across the province. It seems to me that wage theft is rife, that enforcement is poor, and this is happening at a time where we are in a cost-of-living crisis. Not getting the amount of money that you are expecting and are entitled to at a time when your rent is due at the end of the month must send shock waves through families and households.

Just summarize for me: What do you want the government to do to stop wage theft and fix this mess?

Ms. Deena Ladd: That's a very good question; thank you. I think that what we need is resources. I think that people should have the confidence when they go to work

that they'll get their paycheque, or that there is someone looking out for them so that they're getting all their entitlements under the Employment Standards Act.

What we are suggesting is that one in 10 workplaces have a proactive investigation and inspection. If a place is following our basic Employment Standards Act, it should be no problem, but you need employment standards officers to do that. So we're suggesting staffing up to 415 employment standards officers, proactively investigate, improve staffing at the Ministry of Finance to improve collections—because the collection rate is 22%, which is absolutely terrible—and that workers are compensated for the damage that's being caused to them waiting a year and a half for wages that should have just been paid in the first place.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes, government should have people's back when they're taken advantage of. It's pretty simple. It's pretty standard.

My final question, I want to go back to the Canadian Cancer Society. The fall economic statement, the mini-budget, looks like it's going to increase health care spending by about 3.3%, which is below what the Financial Accountability Office estimates is needed to maintain existing services. If we continue on this current trajectory, we will be seeing a small cut in health care service levels. What impact do you think that will have on cancer diagnosis and treatment?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: I think what we really need to focus on here is the changes that we talked about today and those investments that I spoke about that can really underpin Canada's overall commitment to the G7 cancer promise. It's really ensuring that patients have access to the drugs that are approved in Canada and in Ontario. Those pressures—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Thanks to all four of you for presenting today.

Just picking up a little bit on that, Hillary, there are some drugs or treatments for cancer that aren't approved here in Canada because the companies making them have determined that the market isn't big enough for it, but they are available in other places such as in Europe or in the United States. Should the Ontario government be then looking to provide treatment for very rare cancers that very specific drugs exist for but aren't available here?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: Certainly, our overall perspective here is that we want to make sure that these cancer drugs and any decisions about access to them should be transparent and timely. They should be given clear reasons and, of course, clinical experts should be included, as well as the people with lived experience, those cancer patients. That's first and foremost.

We can't really comment on individual cases, in particular drugs and companies that are there. But just to come back to the case that I'm making for take-home cancer drugs: These are drugs that are approved in Ontario, approved through a government program that has been celebrated in terms of the FAST program, but aren't covered automatically in Ontario, and so people are paying out of pocket for those drugs. I think that's a really important step, that we get that part right. I'm not saying that the two things can't happen at the same time, but I think that's a critical first step before we try and think about drugs that maybe aren't yet available fully in Ontario based on the regulations right now.

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Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Do we know how many people might be in that category that we're talking about with take-home cancer drugs right now?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: I don't have the number for you, but I could try to find that. Certainly, the Trillium numbers would be available. The government would have access to those to be able to pull who has applied in past years and how many people are paying out of pocket.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I think there's definitely a big concern—at least on one side of the House, I would say—just around cancer treatment right now. There are a lot of patients who are coming forward. There are a lot of individuals coming forward. And we're seeing that, in some ways on the fly due to court cases, rules are kind of changing or previous policies that the province has put in place are changing. I think it's starting to undermine public trust at a time when I think we want people to know that if you're sick, you go to the hospital and the care is going to be there. I think in your case, it's well taken in terms of take-home cancer drugs.

I think back to my grandmother. This is now, Jeez, over a decade ago, probably almost 15 years ago or so. She had a very rare form of cancer. Thankfully, at that time the cancer drug that she did get, she didn't have to pay that much out of pocket. It cost the government quite a bit of money, but it meant that she was able to be alive and live a relatively comfortable life. Thankfully, she didn't even die because of that cancer; it was something else after. So, I can definitely see the impact and the need that it has on families and individuals.

I want to thank you for bringing that forward, once again, today. I really hope that this is going to be the last year that we see this proposal from the Canadian Cancer Society, because the government then has decided to do something about it and provide that support for patients and quite frankly families as well who are worried about it.

Deena, thanks for your presentation about wage theft. I'll admit I wasn't extremely aware of this. You definitely hear about it anecdotally. Why hasn't the government addressed it? The government likes to talk about, "We want to go after bad actors. We want people to follow the law." Why do you think the government hasn't prioritized or directed resources to ending this practice that would, I would say, then send a chill so that people don't do that in the future?

Ms. Deena Ladd: It is very surprising because the government does have the tools and the ability to do that

in terms of fines, prosecutions and the ability to jail repeat violators, but that doesn't happen.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Deena Ladd: When we did extensive research that went into the report, we realized that since they came into power, prosecutions, inspections, fines have all plummeted by a significant percentage. It doesn't make sense because, in some ways, if you want fair competition in this province—and businesses also talk to us about, "We need a level playing field. How am I supposed to compete with another business that is violating employment standards and not paying people their wages, not paying public holiday pay, overtime pay?" I think it makes common sense to ensure that the law is enforced.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Do you think because it's more affecting workers who might be on the margins of society that the government hasn't prioritized this? I really don't get it. I want the government to be tough on crime on this and to deal with the people who are breaking the law.

Ms. Deena Ladd: Yes—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for the question.

MPP Brady.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I'll start with Hillary and Daniel. I'm heartened, Hillary, that you spoke about OHIP funding for PSA testing. It's an issue that I continue to work on here at Queen's Park with my colleague Wayne Gates. Reiterating the facts on this issue is very important, so I appreciate that.

The Canadian Cancer Society speaks about both finding a cure for cancer and preventing cancer before it starts, your "stop cancer before it starts" advocacy. I think in that report it says that something like 40% of cancer cases are preventable.

How are you measuring progress on the prevention side of the equation? How do we work towards preventing cancers? And are we investing enough in prevention rather than treating?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: I think that there's a lot that we can do when it comes to PSA testing. We know that about 40% of people will survive when the prostate cancer is caught late and about 100% when it's caught early will survive five years or more. So, a really important part of the puzzle is those pieces. As I say, we've applauded the government in terms of colorectal cancer and breast cancer screening. This is the most common cancer in men, so it's about time that we kind of bring that up to the same level and make sure that it's included in that.

In terms of the numbers—you'd think you would see it in the system. When cancer is treated early, you don't need as much treatment. You would maybe spend less time in hospital. There's less cost to the patient individually as well. So, those costs will really come down. It's less of a burden on the health system at large. That's our goal here: really advocating on the patient's behalf to make sure those cancer costs are not taking the place of paying for rent and putting food on the table.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Great. Thank you.

Donna, I'll go back to you because I'm interested in the Community Access to Long-Term Care program.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: I think it's a beautiful idea, but how do we expand that across rural Ontario? It's great that we have it in a few locations, but what would a community like mine have to do to actually be eligible for such a hub model?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We would be delighted to convene a meeting with some of our homes to look at what it could look like in your community, especially where we're building new. If we're building new, why couldn't we build with primary care or home care? It really is the opportunity. Every community is going to be different, and so it really is about bringing the community together, advocating as a community and saying, "This is what the model could look like for us."

Ailsa Craig is built for Ailsa Craig. I think there's a really great opportunity, and we'd be really welcome being able to support your community.

Ms. Bobbi Ann Brady: Great. Thank you.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: My question is for Ms. Donna. Thank you very much for all the information you have been presenting for us today. We've met multiple times. We have been working together on multiple occasions on long-term-care housing. My riding has the Ivan Franko long-term care, which has been taking—I would say, even before I was elected—working on it and we are hoping that they open this spring.

Ms. Donna Duncan: We're hopeful.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Of course, I would like to thank you for hosting conferences and carrying members to regularly attend educational events and updating them about what's going on in the industry. That's really appreciated.

You know that our government invested $6.4 billion to build more than 58,000 new and upgraded long-term-care beds across all parts of the province. Can you speak to the importance of this type of planned investment to improve the conditions and allow more long-term-care patients to get a spot without long waits?

Ms. Donna Duncan: As I said, that's unlocking $22 billion of additional investments from the operators. So, we are building out this sector unlike any other jurisdiction, not only in Canada but in the world, and we are getting state-of-the-art new homes that do not feel like you're walking into a long-term-care home.

We are allowing ourselves to modernize. We're building out hub-like models, bringing other services into the hubs and really having families and residents as part of the design process as well—so, addressing issues that were exposed during COVID, more single rooms, more light, better finishes for infection prevention and control, but also building in room and supports for people who have more complex needs.

In addition, we're building in classrooms. We have Living Classrooms in our long-term-care homes thanks to this government, who's invested heavily in those and into education programs for nurses and PSWs in the homes. So, we're building a workforce in real time in these new homes, and that's revolutionary.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much.

I would also like to maybe pick your brain a little bit about the historic investment that we did in long-term care, including the $4.9 billion to hire and retain 27,000 long-term-care staff. I'm wondering if you can speak to the impact of this type of investment. It's not only in the building and investing in upgrading but preparing the staff which is needed to take care of those long-term-care patients.

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Ms. Donna Duncan: People who work in long-term care are special people. Being able to grow them in the homes and have multi-faceted approaches, including mentorship programs, peer support, preceptors and building in the Living Classrooms—as we bring people into long-term care, the younger they are, the more likely they are to stay because they have a connection with older people. So the investments are landmark investments that have paid off, especially in helping us achieve the four hours of care, the provincial average.

Do we have more work to do on our workforce? Absolutely. But we need to build on those measures that have proven successful, and we're certainly committed to continuing to do that.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Can you also comment on the working conditions of those PSWs and different workers in long-term care in the past—let's say since COVID until now—and how that improved?

Ms. Donna Duncan: By having more front-line staff, it lifts the environment, makes it easier, and takes the strain off existing staff. I would say the number of agency staff being used in the province has reduced exponentially as well since we've gone through these measures. Again, as we build out these new educational programs, it really has helped.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Do you still see some areas which the government should maybe do to improve, especially working conditions?

Ms. Donna Duncan: Technology is going to be an enabler, and also some of the partnerships that we can have. We are still struggling with RPNs across the province, but I think that we just need to continue to build the workforce and be mindful of where they are, especially in rural and remote communities, where it is more difficult to recruit and retain staff. Many of our members are actually building key worker housing for people to work in long-term care in those communities, where there may not be housing and there may not be transportation. Again, to the hub-like model: How do we make things easier for people to work in a community?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to MPP Wong-Tam.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you to our presenters for being here this afternoon.

I'm going to start with Deena Ladd from the Workers' Action Centre. You have produced, basically, a road map for the government of Ontario to fix the problem that they have let grow. That problem includes uncollected wages of $200 million that's owed to workers in Ontario for the past 10 years.

You also cite that there is now growing private litigation and class action lawsuits that are mounting, and it looks like this could aggregate up to $200 million of wages that are unpaid across Canada. I'm sure some of it, obviously, is coming to Ontario.

But I am curious to know: the parties that are being named in this class action and this private litigation—does it include the government of Ontario for failing to do its job?

Ms. Deena Ladd: I don't believe so. I think they're more private companies.

But yes, I think the thing that you're raising is the cost of wage theft. We know that one of the things that has been documented in the United States is the amount of taxes that are not collected when wages are not paid, the health impacts on workers and communities when wages are not paid—workers falling into debt, losing their housing, basically going bankrupt because they are not able to keep a roof over their heads. There are so many consequences of wage theft. I think that that is the biggest issue why it's a no-brainer in terms of ensuring that people have the confidence, that they know they're going to get paid and that employers will actually face the consequences.

Wage theft gets worse as the months progress if you don't catch it earlier. The Nail Fix in the 6ix situation is exactly that. The violations expanded, the conditions worsened, we have more and more workers now—it's close to nearly $100,000 of unpaid wages. The impact on those workers has been horrendous.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Thank you very much. I want to thank you and the Workers' Action Centre for coming to this committee. I know this is not your first time presenting and I certainly know it's not the first time you've raised the alarm bell. But the aggregate of unpaid wages has grown significantly since you first raised this. It's a shame.

I have a question for Donna from the Long Term Care Association. Donna, I understand that we need about 50,000 PSWs by 2032 in Ontario—33,000 nurses—and 55,000 people are on the wait-list for long-term care in our province.

We now are faced with a scandal around OSAP payments. You've probably been following the fact that students are literally abandoning their education. They don't feel like they have a pathway forward because they cannot continue schooling.

Are you concerned about the loss of this year's cohort, or potentially next year's cohort, of graduates that would

have been the entry point to the workforce of Ontario to populate the long-term-care centres that you represent?

Ms. Donna Duncan: The majority of PSWs working in long-term care actually came through their private career college stream. We have been working with the government and having conversations around what are alternate streams and how do we work with the good actors—not all bad players; there are some very, very strong, reputable career colleges who are providing excellent students to stream into our sector—so how can we course-correct to make sure that we don't have that lag, because we will feel it.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Are you confident this is happening?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We're confident that—well, we are having the discussions with the various ministries, and we're all very mindful. We have to solve the problem.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: I wish you success because obviously we want to divert this crisis that you're about to hit.

Ms. Donna Duncan: Yes.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: Do I have time for one more question, sir?

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam: One minute; wonderful.

My final question is for the Canadian Cancer Society. Daniel, nice to see you on the screen. Thank you, Hillary, for your ongoing advocacy. I was listening to your presentation with a little bit of frustration, to be quite honest, because I feel frustrated for you. You are incredibly poised as you present to this committee. But the issue around the take-home drugs to me is a simple one. It's one that will save the Ontario coffers some money. It would make it much easier for the patient to have their drugs taken home.

Has the Ministry of Health given you any indication that they're even on it, that they're considering it?

Ms. Hillary Buchan-Terrell: No. I would say the 2022 budget was kind of the last time we heard about an advisory table for it, but we haven't heard, really, anything since. I think that this is ripe for streamlining. This is also about reducing red tape for government. There's a lot of navigation that's involved in helping people access their cancer drugs—take-home cancer drugs and others—that could be reduced, and the doctor time—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that question.

MPP Cerjanec.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Through you, Chair, thank you, Donna, for coming today, representing your sector.

I've looked through some inspection reports in my riding but beyond as well, and some of it's concerning, that I've read. You're coming here saying, "Okay, please give us more money to build long-term care." But we know as well that, I think, 96% of older adults in Canada don't want to end up in an institutional setting.

So my question is really, is long-term care the best model? Should it be not-for-profit community-based care? What is really the best model to ensure that folks that are aging are able to age in place and get the care that they need?

Ms. Donna Duncan: So we know that about 20% of all adults over 80 will need specialized long-term care, and all care in long-term care in Ontario is publicly funded care. There is some private delivery, but all of the care is publicly funded. Everyone is regulated exactly the same.

What we need to do is focus on quality improvement, making sure that we're working closely with government around a stronger compliance program. There are different approaches where we've spoken to the government about some of the QI initiatives that the Ministry of Labour does, for instance, where they focus on specific areas to ensure more universal improvement but also focusing on where those homes are challenged and how we support and lift the homes up where we know that there are issues.

So it is a process of improvement. We are in a much better place than we were in 2020 and 2021. COVID exposed a lot, but people should have greater comfort.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: Why is it taking so long, then, to rebuild that trust and confidence?

Ms. Donna Duncan: We were hit by a global pandemic, where we were at the epicentre of the media, and—

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We've been beyond that now, though, right?

Ms. Donna Duncan: Yes, but it has been a recovery after decades of lack of investment. The government had just come in, made commitments and suddenly we were in the pandemic. This government has stuck to its commitment to rebuild the sector, made billions of dollars of investments that no other jurisdiction has done.

Is there more work to do? Absolutely. But should the public have more comfort? Absolutely.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: When I talk to seniors in my riding, I hear that they want to stay at home. They want to be able to receive care at home. They want to do that in a community setting. They want to do that around their peers. So that's what I hear from folks in my community.

I know that we've got about I think—this is back to 2020 numbers, though—69% of folks in long-term care that don't have any significant disabilities. I know now we're talking about some community care that may not work in some rural settings, for example. But I question that—yes, long-term care is needed in some situations, absolutely, but why not more towards community-based and home care?

Ms. Donna Duncan: If you look at the Ontario numbers, less than 5% of people could get care in a different setting—sorry, I apologize for my voice—and you can stay at home until you can't.

My own family experience—my father did not want to go into long-term care; we wanted to keep him at home. I was a caregiver who went part-time, but there came a moment where we could no longer safely care for him.

So we do need to make sure that the capacity is there, And as the bump of 80 grows in 2027—the rate of growth over 80 will double next year, and we know that 20% of the population over 80 is likely going to need that specialized care. How do we keep the 80% safe and well

in their homes, recognizing that it is a very small proportion, but it is far more specialized care.

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): One minute.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: I'm a little bit concerned about institutionalization of care. We've moved away from closing mental health institutions, closing institutions with folks with developmental disabilities, but I guess in some ways, we're almost doing that a bit in our long-term-care settings.

Would it make more sense, then, to have the government invest in not-for-profit, small, neighbourhood-based group homes—something closer in communities—and fully staffed? Because I know we're paying over $360 per person per day to keep them locked in a long-term-care ward?

Ms. Donna Duncan: The new homes are homes. And I hope you have an opportunity to visit one, because the way they're set up in neighbourhoods to create those smaller communities—we're also recognizing what are those more complex clinical needs, what equipment is required. The majority—

The Chair (Hon. Ernie Hardeman): Thank you very much. That concludes the time for that answer, it concludes the time for that question and it concludes the time for this panel. With that, I want to thank all the panel members for their presentation.

This concludes our scheduled presentations for today. I want to thank this panel and everyone else who participated today.

If you would like to submit written comments, the deadline for written submissions is 12 p.m. on February 4, 2027. So anyone that made a presentation or anyone that's watching is entitled to reiterate their position with the written presentation.

Having concluded our business for today, this committee now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning, Wednesday, November 18, 2026, when we will begin public hearings on Bill 143.

With that, we're adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1704.

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