

ADDICTIONS AND MENTAL HEALTH ONTARIO

Ontario Budget Highlights 2016

February 25, 2016

Overview

Today Ontario released its 2016 Budget – “*Jobs for Today and Tomorrow.*” As the title suggests, this year’s budget is primarily focused on economic growth and jobs – the main announcements include growing innovation and skills training (including a new Ontario Student Grant program), enhancing infrastructure and improving retirement security through the new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP).

There are some particular areas of interest for the community-based addictions and mental health sector.

Mental Health and Addictions

This year’s Budget specifies three announcements for the mental health and addictions sector, some of which reiterate past announcements. Specifically, it announces:

- Phase Two of Ontario’s 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, investing \$16 million over three years, starting in 2014-15, to create 1,000 new housing spaces for people with mental health and addictions issues, including \$4 million for 248 supportive housing units in 2016-17. (This announcement was made on December 16, 2015).
- Providing \$1.5 million to the Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre in Ottawa to support the construction of a new 30-bed youth residential treatment facility that will increase capacity, improve efficiency and ensure client needs are met in a safe and comfortable environment
- Providing \$2 million to 10 Indigenous organizations to engage with their communities and make recommendations on the unique mental health and addictions issues facing Indigenous peoples. This process will continue to inform the Province’s 10-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

Comprehensive Alcohol Policy Framework

The Budget also says Ontario is holding stakeholder consultations – including with addiction treatment providers – to develop a comprehensive alcohol policy framework (p. 162). AMHO is an active participant in this consultation process.

Pending the results of these consultations, including advice already received on the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder strategy, the government expects to dedicate a portion of alcohol revenue to support resulting programs.

Ontario Disability Support Program

Ontario is increasing social assistance rates by 1.5% for adults receiving Ontario Works and people with disabilities relying on ODSP, with a top-up for those with the lowest social assistance rates.

Health Care

The Budget includes a “Transforming Health Care” chapter, which is attached for your review. This chapter emphasizes Ontario’s continued commitment on moving care into the community.

Specifically, it emphasizes:

Better Access to Primary Care – Expanding the community Health Links – local, interdisciplinary teams – to 82 from 69.

Providing More Coordinated Care in the Community – Investing \$250 million each year for the next two years for home and community care, and \$85 million over three years for primary care teams to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Hospital Funding – Increasing base funding for hospitals by one per cent to expand access to complex hospital clinical services, keep wait times low, maintain access to elective surgery and maintain important health service programs.

Behavioural Supports – An additional \$10 million annually for Behavioural Supports Ontario to help long-term care home residents with dementia and other complex behaviours and neurological conditions.

Related Issues

The Budget also included brief mentions on supportive housing, poverty reduction and charges on alcohol and tobacco that may relate to community-based programs.

Supportive Housing – AMHO is pleased that the government has also invested a further \$178 million over three years under Ontario’s Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, including construction of up to 1,500 new supportive housing units over the long-term.

Local Poverty Reduction – Based on the 2015 Call for Proposals for the “Local Poverty Reduction Fund,” the government is now supporting 41 projects in 20 communities. The next call for proposals will come in Spring 2016, with over \$10 million earmarked for projects related to homelessness (p 139).

Tobacco Tax – To encourage smoking cessation, Ontario is increasing the tobacco tax by \$3 per carton, and will continue doing so annually (at the rate of inflation).

Beverage Alcohol Charges – Ontario will implement some minor price increases for beverage alcohol, which may affect access and consumption rates. These increases include a price mark-up on wine products by 2 percentage points in 2016, the same amount in both 2017 and 2018, and 1 percentage point in 2019.

Contact

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