



Shine On

YMCA Ontario 2024 Pre-Budget Submission:

Building Sustainable Communities for a Stronger Ontario



Content

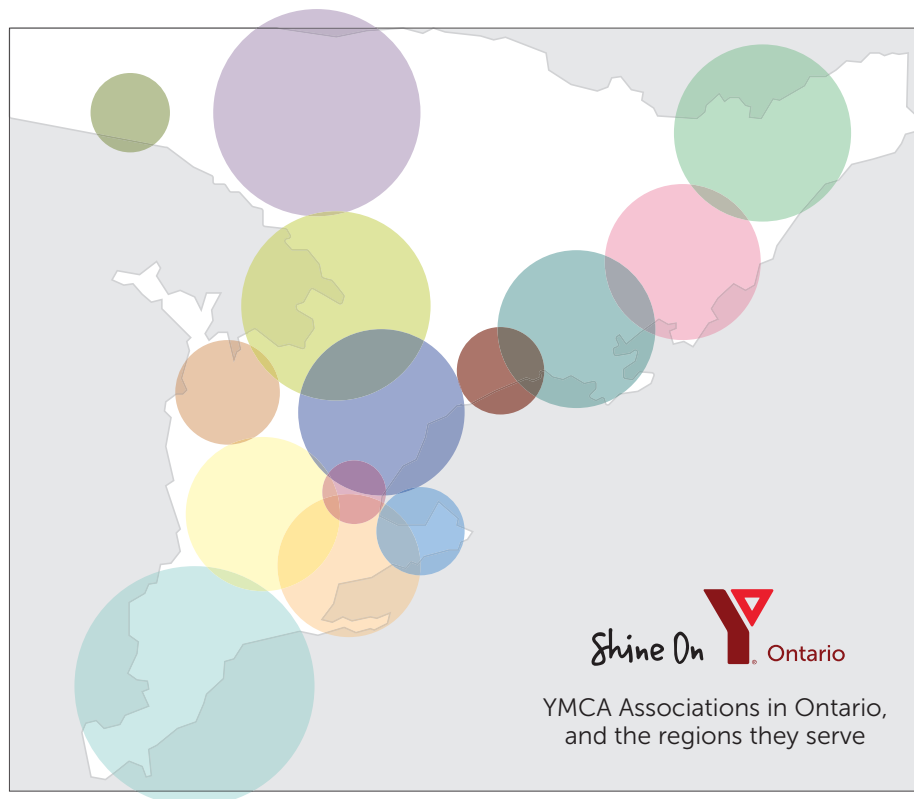
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About the YMCA

The YMCA is one of Ontario's longest-standing charities. Each regional YMCA is unique but all are united in our commitment to advancing the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities.

There are 14 YMCA associations across Ontario, reaching 1.2 million people across 125 diverse communities that include large cities, suburban areas, and rural townships.



- YMCA of National Capital Region
- YMCA of Eastern Ontario
- YMCA of Central East Ontario
- YMCA of Northumberland
- YMCA of Greater Toronto
- YMCA of Oakville
- YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka
- YMCA of Hamilton|Burlington|Brantford
- YMCA of Northeastern Ontario
- YMCA of Sault Ste. Marie
- YMCA of Owen Sound Grey Bruce
- YMCA of Three Rivers
- YMCA of Niagara
- YMCA of Southwestern Ontario



YMCA programs at a glance



Over 60 health, fitness, and aquatics centres where people of all ages and abilities access services to stay healthy and connect with others, and where children and youth participate in swim lessons and lifeguard training.



More than 800 child care locations, enabling parents to work while their kids learn and grow in the care of trained professionals.



Over 25 employment and training centres, where people obtain skills training and are connected to the job market, and where youth access employment counselling and first job training.



Day camp, overnight camp and outdoor education programs where children learn about the environment, develop relationships with peers, and young people gain leadership training and summer employment.



Immigrant settlement services that introduce newcomers to life in Ontario, help them develop language skills, find work and get connected to community supports, and where newcomer youth connect with peers having similar experiences.



Multiple housing sites and shelters that provide safety and warmth and connect people to wrap-around supports to support their well-being and independence.

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

YMCAs in Ontario welcome the opportunity to provide recommendations for Budget 2024. With 14 associations across the province, YMCAs are active in over 125 communities supporting people at all ages and stages of their lives. The Y has an enduring presence in cities, suburban neighbourhoods and rural areas. This gives us a unique vantage point into how Ontarians are doing, what supports they need, and what we can do to help them reach their full potential.

Budget 2024 is an important opportunity to shape the Ontario we want going forward. By listening to the first-hand experience of trusted human service organizations like the YMCA, the government has the opportunity to meaningfully address the most pressing challenges facing our communities. Now more than ever, YMCAs see the need to invest in the long-term sustainability of our licensed child care system, to support upstream investments in physical, social and mental health, and to provide charities with the tools we need to help our communities to thrive.

Budget 2024 provides us with an opportunity to create a more equitable and prosperous Ontario for all – not just for those already equipped to succeed. We hope you will keep this in mind as you allocate investments for the year ahead. We thank you for the opportunity to submit our recommendations for Budget 2024 and we look forward to a prosperous and fulfilling year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lesley Davidson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lesley Davidson
President and CEO, YMCA of Greater Toronto
President, YMCA Ontario



Summary of recommendations

1

Realize Ontario's commitment to the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan:

- a. Ensure long-term sustainability of licensed child care by implementing a permanent funding formula based on full cost recovery.
- b. Mitigate workforce shortages: i) recruit new ECEs to the field, including newcomers; ii) prioritize ECEs as an in-demand profession and recognize home-country credentials; and iii) invest in ECE assistants and support their training.
- c. Reduce administrative burden faced by operators by streamlining municipal reporting requirements and reducing their volume.

2

Improve water safety in Ontario by providing free training for lifeguards: Help more families to access swimming lessons and keep our beaches and pools safe by enabling young people to train and gain employment as lifeguards.

3

Create a community health fund and invest in wrap-around supports for people facing barriers: Improve the physical, social and mental health of Ontarians by providing community health grants to charities to deliver free/low-cost programming to equity deserving communities and invest in wrap-around supports for people experiencing homelessness and barriers to employment.

4

Help charities to thrive in an environment of rising costs:

- a. Provide support for staff compensation increases in grants and funding agreements.
- b. Provide inflationary support for capital projects.
- c. Embed inflationary support into multi-year funding agreements.

Support children and families by implementing a predictable and permanent Child Care funding formula

Implement a permanent funding formula based on full cost recovery

Ontario has made great strides towards the realization of a more affordable and accessible system of licensed child care. Making high-quality child care more affordable and more accessible is a valuable investment that yields social and economic returns by supporting the needs of our youngest learners and allowing more families – specifically women – to participate in the workforce.

YMCAs in Ontario have been delivering high-quality licensed child care in Ontario for more than 55 years. With 76,000 licensed spaces, we collectively represent nearly 1/5th of all licensed child care in the province. The YMCA was thrilled to host the signing of Ontario's historic Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement and has long championed its goals. Last year, YMCAs were excited to see a 50% reduction in fees for families enrolled in licensed child care. We were also encouraged by the release of Ontario's Child Care Workforce Strategy, which enhanced ECE compensation and included investments to promote recruitment.

But there is still work to be done. Unfortunately, while cost savings are being offered to families, the cost burden on operators like the YMCA has grown. This is because the current approach to revenue replacement funding is insufficient,

leaving many non-profit operators with deficits and uncertain outlooks as we negotiate with each municipality for pressure funding. This situation cannot be sustained.

Funding shortfalls in child care predominantly impact non-profit operators who kept fees low over the years to support accessibility for families. As a result, operators like the YMCA are incurring costs that are not being covered via revenue replacement – with no ability to recover costs from parent fees. For example, the YMCA of Greater Toronto has determined that it currently costs \$147 a day to care for an infant but the government only covers \$108. That means the charity is subsidizing the cost of each infant in its care by \$13,129 a year. With a licensed capacity for 400 infants, this represents a loss of \$5.2 million annually for infant programs at the YMCA of Greater Toronto alone. Similar funding shortfalls are being felt across other age groupings and by many other YMCAs across Ontario as well. If a permanent funding formula based on full cost recovery is not introduced in the very near term, many child care programs risk closing at a time when they should be expanding.

To safeguard the progress made towards the realization of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan, **YMCAs urge the government to release a permanent child care funding formula as soon as possible.**



This formula must be based on full cost recovery, reflect partner feedback, and include clear parameters for municipalities to ensure consistent implementation.

Support the recruitment of ECEs, particularly newcomers

Workforce shortages remain an enormous challenge in child care, limiting potential expansion. By the government's own estimates, approximately 14,700 new Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) will be needed by 2025-26 and without interventions, there could be an estimated shortage of 8,500 RECEs by 2026.

Ontario has demonstrated strong commitment to reducing these shortages through the introduction of the recent Child Care Workforce Strategy. To support the strategy, YMCAs call upon Ontario to create policy pathways conducive to recruitment and retention – particularly when it comes to newcomers with backgrounds in early childhood education. **The YMCA urges Ontario to enable the recruitment of newcomer Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) by prioritizing**

early childhood education as an in-demand profession in Ontario and recognizing home country credentials. Ontario should increase investments in accelerated early childhood educator assistant training programs, in addition to increasing compensation levels of assistants working in the sector.

Reduce administrative burden

YMCAs work with 37 different municipalities in order to successfully deliver child care across the many communities we serve. As the service system managers for child care, each municipality brings a different interpretation of provincial guidelines and requires different reporting from operators in their jurisdiction. With some YMCAs working with as many as seven municipalities at a time, varying municipal requirements create a tremendous amount of administrative burden that is resource intensive and creates inefficiencies. That's why **we urge the Province to provide clear and concise parameters to municipalities to reduce the administrative burden faced by operators, and to fully fund operators for the administrative work required.**

Improve water safety while providing young people with early employment

Drowning remains a leading cause of injury-related death among young people in Ontario. Fortunately, swimming lessons can greatly reduce the risk of drowning.¹ At the Y, there is high-demand for swimming lessons but not enough aquatics staff. The province is currently experiencing a lifeguard shortage due to interruptions in lifeguard certification and training throughout the pandemic, leaving many families on waitlists for swimming lessons. YMCAs have always been a top employer of young people, and a place families can rely on to find reasonably-priced swimming lessons, but without enough qualified aquatics staff, children are left dangerously waiting.

Ontario can play an important role in increasing water safety and reducing the risk of drowning by helping families gain access to swimming lessons, while also helping young people get the certifications needed to obtain employment as swim instructors. **YMCAs urge the government of Ontario to provide free certification and training for young people to become lifeguards and swim instructors across the Province.** This investment would be nominal – and the returns would be significant.

For a modest investment of only \$500,000, YMCAs could train approximately 250 people to be lifeguards and swim instructors. This would give young people access to important training, help them to land jobs first jobs in high-demand aquatics programs, give more families access to swimming lessons and improve water safety in Ontario for decades to come. YMCAs are eager to work with our government partners to build out this proposal further in the coming months.



¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4151293/>

3

Invest in the physical, social and mental well-being of Ontarians

Invest in community health

As critical partners in the healthcare continuum, YMCAs are dedicated to improving the physical, social and mental well-being of Ontarians. Our programs and services allow people of all ages and backgrounds to pursue physical fitness in a safe, judgement free and inclusive environment – contributing to overall physical, social and mental health and well-being.

According to the Canadian Health Measures Survey, only 2 in 10 adults and 1 in 10 children and youth are meeting Canada’s physical activity guidelines.² And while many people report having experienced a decline in their physical and mental well-being during the pandemic, research shows that a higher proportion of BIPOC children (i.e., children who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour) experienced a decline in their physical activity levels than those of White/European descent (62% versus 53%).³

The YMCA proudly offers many low-cost programs to the communities we serve – as well as financial assistance and subsidies to those who do not have the ability to pay. With government investment, we could do this on a much larger scale. Offering free or low-cost YMCA programs in priority neighbourhoods, for example, would increase physical activity levels while creating opportunities to connect with others, build self-esteem, and promote mental health.



² <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-018-6166-2>

³ <https://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-Children-and-Youth-Report-Card.pdf>



We urge the government to consider an upstream investment in physical, social and mental health by establishing a community health fund with grants available to non-profit organizations to deliver free and/or low-cost community programming to equity deserving communities.

Invest in wrap-around supports for people facing barriers

YMCAs also work to enable all members of our communities to achieve their full potential. However, for many people facing barriers, including newcomers, people facing homelessness, and those with disabilities, systemic barriers prevent them from achieving what they are capable of.

Greater wrap-around supports can help to address the root causes of these barriers and help people to get back on track. This includes support for deeply affordable housing, mental health treatment and intensive employment training interventions for those facing the most barriers. For this reason, **Ontario YMCAs call on the Ontario government to provide greater investments in wrap-around supports that enable people to achieve their full potential, including new funding for deeply affordable housing, mental health treatment and intensive employment training.**

4

Provide inflationary support for charities experiencing heightened costs

Investing in human service organizations like the YMCA is an investment in the well-being of our communities. As the YMCA continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic's mandated closures and capacity restrictions, we are also facing rising costs related to inflation.

One area impacted by rising inflation is the cost of staffing. As a large community employer, YMCAs employ approximately 13,000 Ontarians. We are also a top employer of young people, with many young people obtaining their first job at the Y. Ongoing staffing shortages, the rising cost of living, and compression issues related to minimum wage hikes has put pressure on the YMCA to increase compensation. **The YMCA continues to call upon the Ontario government to include compensation increases in program grants and funding agreements, including support to address compression pressure related to minimum wage increases.**

Prior to the pandemic, many YMCAs were recipients of federal and provincial funding via the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program* and the *Special Projects Fund* to build and upgrade important social infrastructure in our communities. Ys are building everything from 65 000 square foot *Centres of Community* to playgrounds to accessible washrooms and more.

These projects were approved prior to the pandemic and despite built-in contingency and modest inflationary allowances, COVID-related delays and soaring construction costs have outpaced original allotments.

YMCAs call on the Province to work together with the federal government to alleviate inflationary pressures on infrastructure projects approved prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.



For example, Heritage Canada recently provided funding via the *Canada Cultural Spaces Fund (CCSF)* to support those experiencing cost overruns related to COVID-19. **YMCAs call on Ontario to provide additional inflationary support to non-profit organizations so we can deliver on our commitments to build and refurbish important community assets.**⁴

Inflation has also impacted the front-line services we are delivering to Ontarians through provincially funded programs. When multi-year

agreements do not have inflationary pressures built-in, or when inflationary allowances are below that of the cost of inflation, organizations like the YMCA must cut service levels or operate at a deficit.⁵

In order to maintain the quality of provincially funded programs and to ensure that charities like the YMCA can meet our service obligations to our communities, Ontario must address rising costs of program delivery by providing full coverage for inflation in multi-year funding agreements.

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/cultural-spaces-fund.html>

⁵ <https://www.imaginecanada.ca/en/360/forced-to-do-more-with-less-impact-inflation-charities-and-nonprofits>



Conclusion

The YMCA is proud to be a provincial partner in the delivery of programs and services that improve the lives of Ontarians. As the Province makes critical choices in the lead up to Budget 2024, we thank you for the opportunity to provide insight and recommendations based on our unique vantage point as community health and human service providers serving diverse groups of children, individuals and families across the Province.

We are encouraged by the willingness of the Ministry teams we work with to engage and listen to our feedback. We look forward to continuing to work together to develop solutions that will help achieve better health and prosperity for the people of Ontario.



For More Information Contact

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