



**Ontario Municipal Social
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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) to submit our recommendations for the 2011 federal budget.

Now in our 61st year, OMSSA is the professional staff association representing Consolidated Municipal Service Managers and District Social Services Administration Boards across Ontario. Our members are the provincially designated municipal service system managers responsible for administering and delivering a range of human services, including social housing, homelessness prevention, early learning and child care, and income and employment support programs. Their work—supported in part by significant investments by local municipalities—help to make Ontario's communities physically, socially, and economically healthy places to live, work, and grow.

As we enter 2011, there are signs that Canada is turning an economic corner. It is precisely now that the federal government must reinforce the foundations of economic certainty by investing directly in the people of Canada. By expanding investments in affordable housing and homelessness prevention, reinforcing the economic security of Canadians, and creating opportunities for early learning and child care, the government will signal to the Canadian people its commitment to keeping our country and our communities on the path to economic prosperity.

We therefore recommend that the 2011 federal budget include the following three foundational investments in the people of Canada:

- Ensuring that all Canadians have access to affordable, appropriate housing, through the expansion of the Affordable Housing Program
- Ensuring economic security through improvement to the Employment Insurance program and other supports to increase long-term workforce attachment
- Expanding parental choices in obtaining quality early learning and child care opportunities.

Foundational investment 1: Ensuring access to affordable, appropriate housing

OMSSA appreciates the federal investments in increasing the supply of affordable housing and in preventing homelessness, which is fundamental to Ontario's economic and social development. Affordable housing creates a sense of certainty and stability, letting people set down roots in a community near their jobs, schools, and friends. The construction of new affordable housing contributes to the economic health of communities, and investments in housing and related supports also reduce demand on other public services, such as health care and emergency responses.

Adequate, affordable housing is also crucial to ending homelessness in Canada. The shortage of adequate, affordable housing means that many Canadians will be homeless. Too often, it is individuals and families living in poverty who are often the most disadvantaged in finding proper housing.

To secure the foundation for housing, therefore, the federal government can:

- Expand and make permanent the Affordable Housing Program (AHP) through a long-term, sustained, and predictable investment plan for housing. Through the homeownership and rental components, the supportive housing component, and the Northern housing component, the AHP has increased the availability and accessibility of housing in every community across Ontario. It is, in short, an effective and responsive program that helps individuals and families, neighbourhoods and communities, and the province and nation as a whole
- Expand the Homelessness Partnership Initiative to include communities of all sizes, thus bringing the fight against homelessness to every part of our country
- Support the passage of Bill C-304 and the development of a national housing strategy

Last year, the Senate approved the landmark report, *In from the margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing, and Homelessness*. This year, the government can heed that call to action by investing in affordable housing and homelessness prevention and creating a solid foundation for Canadians to achieve a sense of economic security and self-sufficiency.

Foundational investment 2: Economic security through workforce attachment

More than any other tool in the economic security system toolbox, the development of the labour force most directly contributes to individual economic security and community prosperity.

Employment is fundamental to our daily lives, providing us with the resources to become self-sufficient and economically independent.

We look to the federal government, therefore, to become an active partner with the provinces and municipalities to transform the economic security system in ways that address the needs of all Canadians. By increasing people's economic self-sufficiency through workforce attachment, we can reduce public assistance levels, increase local spending, and expand community tax bases. Most important, we can transform the lives of individuals who, in a new state of economic self-sufficiency, become contributing members of their community. But even as we shift towards a national workforce development strategy, we must reinforce the income supports necessary to

allow those Canadians who are unable to attach to the workforce to live a life of dignity and sustainability.

To secure the foundation for economic security, therefore, the federal government can:

- Restructuring the economic security system into a single, seamless system that works across federal, provincial, and municipal lines. The multiple programs—Employment Insurance, Old Age Supplement, CPP, provincial social assistance, tax credits, and so forth—must be better aligned so as to create an economic security system that encourages sustainable attachment to the workforce and supports those who are unable to do so.
- Work in closer partnership with the provinces and municipalities to develop a comprehensive labour market development strategy that focuses on long-term, sustainable workforce attachment and the expanding self-employed, contract, and contingent workforce. Doing so will support Canadians who need temporary support during times of career transition and will open opportunities for more Canadians to pursue higher-earning careers, thus bolstering the competitiveness, effectiveness, and productivity of Canada's workforce.

Foundational investment 3: Creating opportunities for early learning and child care

From a long-term perspective, investing in our children builds the best foundation for families and communities. The competitiveness of Canadians tomorrow will emerge out of the healthy development of our children today. Parents want the security of having the ability to choose safe, nurturing environments for their young children in which to play and learn and grow.

The federal government can strengthen the foundation for families and for economic security by investing in quality licensed early learning and child care. Not only will this foster individual prosperity, but a solid early learning and child care sector—providing high quality learning opportunities—provides economic benefits for the wider community. Working parents pay more income taxes and have more money to spend locally, while a thriving child care sector also employs more workers and raises local economic competitiveness.

To secure the foundation for early learning and child care, therefore, the federal government can invest in national improvements in the quality of licensed early learning and child care programs.

OMSSA's recommendations reinforce our desire to see Canada enhance the foundation the results in greater security for individuals and families. By investing in the economic security of the people of Canada—through investments in affordable housing, income and employment sustainability, and early learning and child care—the government can take a major step forward in eliminating poverty in our country. Such investments make sense will make a real difference in the lives of all Canadians—with the result being a strong, prosperous, and secure future for Canada in an increasingly competitive world.

Yours sincerely,



David Rennie
President, OMSSA

cc: The Honourable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance