

January 29, 2026

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Communications Services Branch
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

RE: 2026 Budget Consultation

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

On behalf of Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities (SCHC) and our 25,000+ clients, I am pleased to submit our recommendations for the 2026 Ontario pre-budget consultation.

Established in 1977, SCHC is an accredited comprehensive community health organization that delivers a range of holistic health and wellness services from early years to end of life. For half a century, we have been serving vulnerable residents (newcomers, visible minorities, families living with poverty, the unhoused and unemployed) across Scarborough who experience many barriers to accessing necessary services and programs. We are dedicated to igniting the strength of community, by addressing the physical, mental, social, financial and environmental aspects of our clients' health through our community health, engagement and support services teams.

Over the past two years, our food bank has experienced a 60% increase in visits. Our community members continue to struggle with affordability and food insecurity. While most people see the high costs of social services such as healthcare, the cost of poverty, one of the largest burdens put on the tax payers of Ontario, often goes unrecognized.

By investing in poverty reduction and population health, the Government of Ontario could create prosperity and opportunity for all Ontarians from the reduced costs to healthcare and the justice systems, while protecting our economy with improved services.

Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities would like to put forward the following recommendations:

1. Improve affordability of our community
2. Strengthen home and community-based care
3. Ensure population health

Affordability for our community:

- Raise social assistance rates for OW and ODSP recipients above the poverty line. While ODSP rates were increased by 2.8% in July 2025, OW has remained stagnant. Despite the increase, ODSP rates are significantly below the poverty line, leaving recipients not being able to meet their basic needs. By improving supports, low-income Ontarians will have the foundation necessary to lift themselves out of poverty, allowing them to invest in their local economies.
- Invest in shelter, affordable and supportive housing spaces. This will help address chronic homelessness and those with mental health and addictions challenges experiencing homelessness. Provide incentives for collaborations between health and social service organizations and housing providers. Such partnerships are particularly effective at supporting eviction prevention efforts and enhance the overall likelihood of long-term housing success for recently housed individuals.
- The supply of affordable rental housing is not meeting the demand, and the lack of rental market regulations is contributing to massive rent increases and loss of affordable housing. Both need to be addressed by ensuring that a portion of new homes are permanently affordable and strengthening rent regulations in private market environments to improve overall affordability.

Strengthening Home and Community Based Care for our community:

- Invest in home and community care organizations to support Ontario's aging population as well as those with disabilities, chronic disease, other health-related challenges, their families, and caregivers. The cost of delivering care in the community is significantly less than providing it in the acute care sector. Every person diverted from hospital or long-term care (LTC) into the community saves government and taxpayers' dollars. These investments are critical to support community-based organizations to sustain and/or expand operations, reduce wait times for services and help individuals to age in place all while alleviating strain on the acute and LTC sectors.
- Invest to support wage parity for home and community care workers such as PSWs and nurses so community organizations can remain competitive, by recruiting and retaining the staff they need to meet the needs of their communities. According to Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA), the 200,000 community health workers face a combined wage gap of over \$2 billion compared to their peers doing similar work in other publicly funded settings, including in hospitals and schools.

Ensuring population health for our community:

- Continue to invest in prevention and health promotion models that focus on integrated primary, mental health and social support care. Integrated care models have been shown to improve overall population health and reduce burden on health systems as well as other social safety benefits.
- Develop a robust recruitment and retention strategy to improve the province's human resource capacity for primary care as well as community and mental health sectors to reduce wait times and improve service quality.
- Invest in mental health supports to address demand for services such as harm reduction, counselling, and specialized services like psychiatry for adults, children, and youth to ease downstream burden on our healthcare system.

Thank you for considering our recommendations for Ontario's 2026 budget. We welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss our budget recommendations in person.

Sincerely,



Jeanie Argiropoulos, MHSc, CHE
President and Chief Executive Officer