



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

October 1, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

RE: Open Letter – A Call to Better Support Children, Youth, and Families

Dear Premier Doug Ford,

Every October, children's aid societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies (child welfare agencies), together with their community partners, raise awareness about the importance of supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families through the provincial [Dress Purple Day](#) campaign.

As part of this year's campaign, we are writing on behalf of organizations dedicated to supporting children, youth, and families across the province. They include municipalities and non-profits, as well as organizations in child welfare, immigration and refugee services, integrated youth services, mental health care, community health, child development and rehabilitation, child and family services, intellectual and developmental disabilities, hunger relief, housing, and social work.

We are calling on the Ontario government to take immediate action to ensure community-based organizations and service providers across the province have adequate resources (i.e., funding, staff) to truly respond to the needs of children, youth, and families. The province must take a cross-ministerial approach to investing in community-based organizations and service providers and bolstering social infrastructure by:

- Developing and promoting integrated, wraparound approaches to service delivery so children, youth, and families have access to individualized, coordinated care that is easy to navigate and meets their unique needs.

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- Making targeted investments in communities so that all children, youth, and families have access to the supports and services they need to thrive close to home, regardless of where they live.
- Addressing the systemic gaps and barriers to meet children, youth, and families where they are at, across all levels of care.
- Improving access to early intervention and prevention-focused programs and initiatives that ensure families can access the right care, at the right time, before they escalate and reach the point of crisis.
- Ensuring children, youth, and families presenting with complex needs (i.e., social, emotional, developmental, mental health and addictions, etc.) have access to highly specialized, intensive supports, services, and/or treatment responsive to their unique needs in their communities and also that children, youth, and families continue to receive seamless, consistent care as they transition to adult services, if needed, without losing support as they age.

Children, youth, and families across Ontario are facing significant challenges amidst a period of heightened economic vulnerability. High inflation rates over the past few years have increased the cost of basic needs, such as housing, food, healthcare, and more. Though the inflation rate has recently decelerated in Canada, the cost-of-living has not lessened and the number of people living in poverty is growing in regions across the province. Organizations and service providers are struggling to support the most vulnerable in their communities.

Children, youth and families should have easy and equitable access to supports and services in their communities that are high-quality, trauma-informed, identity-affirming, and inclusive. But this is not the case. Community-based organizations and service providers delivering critical supports and programming have become increasingly scant, siloed, and splintered. For some children, youth, and families, the supports and services they need are simply not available in their community. For others, they face lengthy wait times. Too many young people and their families are left without support and resources vital to their health and well-being.

Earlier this year, the [Financial Accountability Office of Ontario](#) (FAO) released a report on the spending plan of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). The FAO highlighted that Ontario has underfunded MCCSS by an [estimated](#) \$3.7 billion less than is needed to fund existing programs and fulfill announced commitments. Further, the FAO projected continued shortfalls in the coming years.

Additionally, the [Ontario Nonprofit Network](#) (ONN) recently released a report with alarming findings regarding the health of the nonprofit sector. In [2023 State of the Sector](#), ONN shared results over the past four years which demonstrate that the

demand for services and supports has been increasing, nonprofits are facing worsening economic hardships, and there is a persisting shortage of human resources. They also showed that nonprofits are cutting back programs and services to cope, waitlists are growing, and the number of closures is climbing.

The government of Ontario cannot ignore these warning signs. If the province fails to act, we fear what this will mean for children, youth, and families in the short- and long-term. The challenges many children, youth, and families face will intensify. More and more will be pushed to the point of crisis, which can have devastating impacts on their health and well-being and lead to negative outcomes. We need the government to champion community-based organizations and service providers, who are the backbone of our social infrastructure in Ontario.

We remind Ontario that weak social infrastructure and systemic gaps in access to community-based organizations and service providers delivering culturally relevant and responsive services that centre the social determinants of health are acutely felt by Indigenous, Black, racialized, newcomers and refugees, Francophone, and 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, and families, including those presenting with complex needs. These gaps are only compounded by location. Children, youth, and families living in Northern, rural, and remote parts of Ontario face unique challenges in accessing the right care, at the right time, close to home.

On October 25, child welfare agencies, community-based organizations, service providers, and provincial partners will wear purple to show children, youth, and families they are not alone. We will wear purple to show Ontario it is time to act.

Ontario must address systemic gaps and take clear and decisive action to improve the capacity of community-based organizations and service providers to respond to the increasing level of need from children youth and families across the province. The province has to step up and ensure organizations and service providers are well equipped to effectively work together to wrap around children, youth, and families. The time is now. We cannot wait. *They* cannot wait.

Sincerely,

Solomon Owoo
CEO
Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

**CC: Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and
MPP for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill**



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Signed on behalf of the following organizations that endorse this call:

Melanie Redman, Co-founder, President & CEO, A Way Home Canada
 Krishna Ganesan, Interim Policy Director, Addictions & Mental Health Ontario
 Sarah Hobbs, Chief Executive Officer, Alliance for Healthier Communities
 Robin Jones, President, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
 Micheal Miller, Executive Director, Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario
 Jamie McCleary, Executive Director, Autism Canada
 Margaret Spoelstra, Chief Executive Officer, Autism Ontario
 Owen Charters, President & CEO, BGC Canada
 Kingsley Gilliam, Director of Communications, Social Justice and Social Services, Black Action Defense Committee
 Kayla Yama, President & CEO, Boost Child and Youth Advocacy Centre
 Kevin Harris, President, Canadian Foster Family Association
 Jeffrey Schiffer, Board Chair, Child Welfare League of Canada
 Valerie McMurtry, President & CEO, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
 Tatum Wilson, CEO, Children's Mental Health Ontario
 Susan Somogyi, Chief Executive Officer, Family Service Ontario
 Carolyn Stewart, CEO, Feed Ontario
 Vanessa Milley, Executive Director, Foster Parent Society of Ontario
 Julie Despaties, Executive Director & Founder, Interwoven Connections
 Judith Clark, President, League of Ontario Foster Families
 Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director, Laidlaw Foundation
 Marlene Ham, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
 Ajirioghene Evi, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Association of Social Workers
 Robert Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs
 Cheyanne Ratnam, Co-Founder and CEO, Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition
 Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
 Liora Sobel, Chief Operating Officer, StepStones
 Kymani Montgomery, Executive Director, Ten Oaks
 Derrick Carl Biso, Administrative and Team Lead, Trans Wellness Ontario

