



## **Summary of OMSSA Federal Budget Consultation** **January 2018**

### **Who is OMSSA?**

Established in 1950, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) is a non-profit organization whose members are the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) across Ontario. OMSSA represents all 47 cities, regions, counties and districts within Ontario. Unlike other provinces, local governments in Ontario have a unique role in the planning, administration and delivery of child care, social assistance and housing and in some instances, public health, emergency services and long-term care, within their communities. We support leadership in integrated human services through strong local service system management in each municipality. We acknowledge the important relationship OMSSA members have with our provincial and federal partners.

OMSSA members support the federal government's focus on the human services sector. Investments in poverty reduction, homelessness prevention, mental health, child care, affordable housing and social infrastructure have a direct impact on our members ability to support the community. Service managers support the most vulnerable members of their communities and clients' needs of affordable housing and quality wrap around services, such as addiction and mental health supports, now. OMSSA's members work with children, off reserve Indigenous, people with disabilities, seniors, new Canadians, working poor, hard to house individuals, those impacted by long term unemployment, and families impacted by domestic violence.

### **National Housing Strategy**

- OMSSA applauds and supports the National Housing Strategy and new federal dollars in housing.
- OMSSA members, who are the service system managers for housing services and other human services in 47 municipalities and districts across Ontario are pleased with the government's National Housing Strategy but concur that the promised funds cannot wait 10 years.

- The National Housing Strategy requires matching funds from the province and OMSSA encourages the federal government to reach an agreement with the Province of Ontario as soon as possible so that the Strategy can be executed.
- OMSSA has consistently called for a truly portable housing benefit funded by the federal or provincial government that would promote mobility and choice across Ontario and all of Canada for persons in need of affordable housing. We would encourage the government to implement this valuable tool earlier than the 2020 target date.
- OMSSA encourages additional capital investment to increase affordable housing and rental stock targeted to areas with low vacancy rates, below 3%.
- End of Operating agreements are imminent across Ontario and federal funding is needed to ensure these units continue to serve those most in need.
- Several Northern Ontario communities, (Kenora, Cochrane and Rainy River) share the same attributes as Canada's north and should share in the \$300 M that has been allocated for Canada's North.
- OMSSA calls for specific support for shelters and transitional housing, which are often not available or at capacity in Ontario.
- OMSSA urges the federal government to work with local service managers on veteran's housing projects in communities such as Simcoe and Muskoka.
- OMSSA members are unanimous in their concern for potential reporting and administrative burdens, which are costly and counter-productive to rolling out the strategy.
- The Federal government must consider the needs of rural and Northern communities where there is a need for housing, and significant homeless populations are present.
- Data such as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) vacancy and average market rents is often less accurate and harder to obtain in rural census areas. This is a challenge for planning and decision making. Investments in data collection would be welcome, especially in rural and Northern areas where reliable data is difficult to obtain.

### **National Poverty Reduction Strategy**

- OMSSA is very supportive and an interested stakeholder in the National Poverty Reduction Plan.
- We encourage the federal government to complete and release the National Poverty Reduction Plan this year.
- To reduce poverty and homelessness in Canada, Ontario and locally, efforts must be coordinated through a close partnership by all levels of government.

- Housing is a crucial component in reducing poverty across Canada. However, support services are also required, as poor health, disabilities, addictions, and mental health are common features of poverty. OMSSA calls on the federal government to make a significant investment in mental health and addictions.
- Precarious employment is a major issue that impacts the quality of life for those impacted. Investments in skills development and employment support are an important priority.

### **Health**

- The opioid crisis has had an impact on large and small communities within Ontario and has become an urgent problem across the province. A federal approach is required to address this issue in large and small communities across Canada.

### **Marijuana Legalization**

- Policies and budget decisions will be necessary to ensure that the legalization and regulation of cannabis is implemented in a fair and safe manner, including minimizing any unforeseen impacts on municipal services (i.e., enforcement).
- Revenue generated from taxation must be shared with the municipalities in a manner that is cost neutral to property taxpayers.
- Clarity will be required in terms of how landlords can set rules related to tenants smoking or growing marijuana within their units.

### **Newcomer Settlement**

- The policies of the United States Administration could lead to additional refugee claims at Canadian borders, as evidenced by the recent influx of Haitians. Through the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, sustainable funding is needed to support programs, including the co-ordination of programs. Local governments must be able to provide input into policy and program development to support services to newcomers upon arrival to Canada.
- Adequate funding is needed for the immigration settlement sector, including the Local Immigration Partnership and the Welcome Centres. In York Region and Peel Region, current funding is not reflective of the growing newcomer population. OMSSA encourages the federal government to ensure that new funding is directed to areas with large and growing newcomer populations where the need is greatest.

### **National Seniors Strategy**

- OMSSA supports a National Seniors Strategy.
- There is a need for a variety of housing options for seniors, (type and tenure), including affordable retirement homes, to enable seniors to age in place for longer.

- Investment in seniors' basic needs, including increased income support, dental benefits and a holistic approach to healthcare, including alternative therapies that may reduce the need for medication.
- Investment in caregiver supports, including financial assistance is also required.
- Technology investments to improve coordination and integrated service delivery including expanded e-prescribing and virtual care initiatives would be welcomed.

### **Child Care**

- Federal government investments in child care are appreciated by OMSSA members.
- Additional investments to address affordability and universal access would make a major difference in addressing child poverty in Ontario.
- The federal government should also work with the province of Ontario to reduce unnecessary administration and reporting that has become a burden for service managers at the local level government.

### **Rural and Northern Ontario**

- While homelessness in cities such as Toronto and Ottawa are obvious, the hidden homelessness found in mid-sized, suburban, rural and Northern communities is an important feature.
- Rural and Northern communities have unique challenges related to declining populations and large geographical territories. Transportation is often lacking in rural and Northern Ontario, presenting barriers to accessing services. Broadband is also required as a crucial component to accessing services of the future and promoting economic development in rural and Northern areas. OMSSA members support additional investment in transportation and broadband infrastructure.
- A one size fits all approach will not work in Ontario or Canada.
- Any new program requirements must allow for local flexibility to address unique needs of both large and small communities across Canada.

### **Social Infrastructure**

- There is a major infrastructure funding gap impacting municipalities across Canada, which in turn impacts human services and housing.
- OMSSA would like to see a federal infrastructure investment in communities through the development of or research for, community benefits agreements. These benefits should include: local job creation, apprenticeships, affordable housing, education, support for seniors, health care, and other key benefits for communities.

### **Equalization:**

- The federal government must reevaluate the equalization program in Canada and determine if changes are required to provide a deal that is fair to the province of Ontario and all provinces. Ontario spends the lowest per-capita on social services within confederation. It has been calculated that equalization costs the province of Ontario over \$10 B per year. This funding is needed to support health, education and social services within the Province of Ontario.
- Municipalities only receive 9 cents out of every dollar collected in taxes. The property tax base alone cannot fund the responsibilities of municipal government alone. Municipalities require additional as well as new sources of funding to address increased costs in the delivery of services within the local mandate.

### **Conclusion:**

A new study, published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal by Dr. Daniel Dutton of the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary compared funding for health care and social services from 1981 to 2011. They found that average per capita spending for health was \$2,900, almost three times the \$930 per capita spending for social services. The study suggests if governments had spent one more cent on social services for every dollar spent on health, life expectancy in this country could have increased by another 5 per cent and avoidable mortality could have dropped an additional 3 per cent.

OMSSA would like to see an increased focus on social services to ensure a sustainable health care system with prevention being a high priority. There is good value and positive outcomes for every dollar invested in social services. OMSSA members are proud of the role they play in affordable housing, income support, emergency services, employment support, child care, newcomer settlement and public health. We also appreciate our partnerships with the federal and provincial government and look forward to working together to address challenges of mutual concern.