

ONTARIO BUDGET 2021

Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and our Economy

Impacts for Occupational Therapists

Ontario's Finance Minister, the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, introduced the 2021 provincial budget, [*Ontario's Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and our Economy*](#) on March 24, 2021. Largely focused on managing the health of Ontarians and the provincial economy which have suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the budget outlines Ontario's next steps to defeat COVID-19. The \$186 billion budget brings total investments to \$16.3 billion to protect people's health and \$23.3 billion to protect our economy. Ontario's total response to COVID-19 is now \$51 billion.

Occupational therapists are part of the province's largest and most expensive industry – health care. Budget investment in the sector is significant and occupational therapists will welcome many commitments that improve health services. Of note are financial commitments to capital developments for hospitals and long-term care homes, investment in 2 new children's treatment centres that will improve access to rehabilitation services including occupational therapy, a commitment to increased funding for staffing including allied health professionals in long-term care homes, and continued investment in the province's mental health and addictions services.

As the profession welcomes the above investments, occupational therapists will be disappointed to see the limited investment (20% over 4 years) in LTCH allied health staffing levels, the commitment to build new hospital beds without the visible commitment of staffing for these facilities, and the lack of dedicated investment in home care at a time that home care has the potential to increase its value and contribution to the health system and the capacity of seniors to age at home.

We encourage occupational therapists to [review the Budget document](#), but highlight the following listing of budget commitments of particular relevance to occupational therapists.

Long-Term Care Homes

- Ontario is investing up to \$650 million in additional funding to long-term care homes in 2021–22 to protect loved ones in LTCHs from the virus and to stabilize homes, in addition to providing \$30 million annually to recruit, retain and train infection prevention and control staff in long-term care homes across the province.
- Over the next four years, the average hours of daily direct care will increase to four hours, from the current 2.75 hours. To support this plan, the government will invest up to \$1.9 billion annually by 2024–25, or \$4.9 billion over the next four years. In addition, this funding will

support a 20 per cent increase in direct care time by allied health professionals including physiotherapists and social worker

Investments to Achieve an Average of 4 Hours of Direct Care in Long-Term Care

The government is investing an additional **\$4.9 billion** over the next four years.



Source: Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care.

The government is committed to addressing long-standing and systemic challenges in the sector and improving care for residents in long-term care based on input from the Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission’s findings. The government is working to establish a new vision for long-term care homes in consultation with residents, families and the sector, including establishing a resident quality of care framework which will outline performance measures to guide oversight and quality improvement in long-term care homes.

Long-Term Care at Home

- Through the Community Paramedicine for Long-Term Care program, seniors can receive the quality care and service they need at home. While Ontario is accelerating the development of thousands of new long-term care beds to increase capacity, this innovative resident-centred program will allow seniors to live longer in the comfort of their own homes. Ontario began a pilot in five communities in 2020 and is investing approximately \$160 million over three years to support the program in 33 communities, see Table 1.2 for the details

Table 1.2

Communities Participating in the Paramedicine for Long-Term Care Program

Chatham-Kent	Leeds-Grenville
Cornwall and Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry	Manitoulin and District of Sudbury
Dufferin County	Middlesex County and London
Essex County and Windsor	Muskoka
Frontenac County and Kingston	Niagara Region
Greater Sudbury	Nipissing District
Grey County	Parry Sound
Guelph and Wellington County	Peel Region
Haliburton County	Rainy River District
Halton Region	Simcoe County
Hamilton	Thunder Bay and District
Hastings County, Belleville, Quinte West and Prince Edward County	Toronto
Lambton County	Waterloo Region
Lanark County	Norfolk County
Brant County	Renfrew County
City of Ottawa	York Region
Cochrane District	

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health.

Mental Health

- With the launch of the Roadmap to Wellness in March 2020, Ontario is building a modern and connected mental health and addictions system that makes high-quality services available for people throughout their lifetime, where and when they need them. The Roadmap to Wellness is focused on improving quality, expanding existing services, implementing innovative solutions and improving access.
- Ontario will provide additional funding of \$175 million in 2021–22 for more mental health and addictions support services. This is part of Ontario’s historic investment of \$3.8 billion over 10 years for mental health and addictions services. To deliver on the Roadmap to Wellness, Ontario is implementing a framework to identify and define the core mental health and addictions services to be made available to the people of Ontario, regardless of where they live. This will make it easier to connect providers across community, primary care and acute care settings.
- **Providing Mental Health Supports for Postsecondary Students** To help postsecondary students during COVID-19, Ontario has provided an additional \$7 million in 2020–21 to increase access to mental health and addiction services, building on an investment of \$19.25 million announced in October 2020. This funding will provide services to those studying on campus or virtually and will help address the needs of vulnerable and diverse groups, such as Indigenous students, LGBTQ+ students and students with disabilities. Creating Mobile Mental Health Clinics in Rural and Underserved Communities in Ontario Individuals living in remote, rural and underserved communities often face additional barriers to accessing mental health care. To support these communities, the government will create four new mobile mental health clinics across the province. These mobile mental health clinics will offer a full suite of mental health and addictions services, which will reduce the burden on emergency departments and inpatient hospitalizations. The mobile clinics will begin operating across Ontario in summer 2021.
- **Looking Out for Ontario Provincial Police Officers** Ontario recognizes the resolve and dedication of heroic OPP officers, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ontario is investing \$12.5 million over three years to enhance the mental health services available to OPP staff. This initiative is part of Ontario’s response to recommendations made in the *Ontario Provincial Police Independent Review Panel: Final Report* to create a healthier, more supportive work environment for OPP officers and civilian staff.
- **Supporting Ontario’s First Responders** Ontario recognizes the importance of breaking down barriers for first responders in accessing treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health disorders. The Province’s investments will work towards both the prevention of PTSD in first responders through early intervention and the return to a healthy and productive work and family life for many.

Building an Innovative and Responsive Health Care System

- A key part of Ontario’s plan to improve the patient experience and support better access to health care services was the creation of Ontario Health Teams and Ontario Health. Ontario Health Teams bring together health care providers to work as one team to improve patient outcomes, with better care coordination and 24/7 navigation of services. Ontario Health Teams will play an essential role in supporting the government’s priority to deliver a new model of care that will better support patients throughout their entire health care journey. Ontario Health Teams strengthened the local response to COVID-19 through on-the-ground partnerships in infection prevention and control, testing, isolation centres and staffing support for congregate care settings. The strong partnerships and integrated care established by Ontario Health Teams and Ontario Health have helped better position the province to respond quickly and effectively to COVID-19. This includes supporting long-term care homes, simplifying the purchase of PPE, helping establish assessment centres, launching virtual urgent care initiatives and expanding remote patient monitoring programs to support COVID-19 patients and other vulnerable populations.

Hospital Sector

- Ontario will invest an additional \$1.8 billion in the hospital sector in 2021–22 bringing the total additional investment in hospitals since the start of the pandemic to over \$5.1 billion. This is providing for more than 3,100 beds to increase capacity and reduce occupancy pressures caused by COVID-19. The creation of over 3,100 new beds is the equivalent of six new large community hospitals in the province
- An additional \$778 million funding for patient needs will support four key areas:
 - *Caring for a Growing and Aging Population*: new investments to provide patients additional surgical and diagnostic procedures, which include funding for cancer and chronic kidney disease services, cardiac services, neurological services, organ and tissue donation and transplantation, and MRI/CT hours. Funding will also provide provincial programs such as newborn screening, cochlear implants, sexual assault and domestic violence centres.
 - *Supporting Hospital Beds*: Funding to support hospitals expanding services and updating equipment and facilities. Funding will also support newly opened reactivation care centres, which provide temporary care to help patients who no longer need acute care services and are waiting for alternative care facilities, such as long-term care homes.
 - *Providing Clinical Services*: additional funding to emergency departments and support services such as obstetrics, pediatrics, ambulatory care medicine and hospital-based mental health.
 - *Specialty Psychiatric Hospitals, Specialty Children Hospitals and Small Hospitals*: additional funding for Ontario’s 66 small hospitals, two specialty childrens hospitals and four specialty psychiatric hospitals

Chart 1.4

Examples of Health Projects under Construction or in Planning

Northern

- **Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences – Cardiovascular Surgery Program** – New investment to enable bringing cardiac care closer to home and enable future expansion of dialysis services.
- **Weeneebayko Area Health Authority – Health Campus of Care** – New culturally appropriate health campus that will include a new hospital and a lodge in Moosonee, as well as a new ambulatory care centre on Moose Factory Island.
- **Geraldton and District Hospital – Emergency Department Redevelopment** – Expansion of the existing Emergency Department along with renovations to the existing facility to meet patient care needs.

Southwestern

- **London Health Sciences Centre – Stem Cell Transplant Expansion** – Renovations to increase inpatient beds and ambulatory capacity to expand capacity for highly complex cancer treatment.
- **Windsor Regional Hospital – New Windsor-Essex Greenfield Hospital** – Construction of a new hospital to consolidate acute care services, while retaining the existing Ouellette site for urgent care and ambulatory services.
- **Windsor Hotel-Dieu Healthcare – Mental Health Inpatient Bed Expansion** – Renovations to Hotel-Dieu's Tayfour site to enable consolidation of mental health services.
- **Grey Bruce Health Services – Markdale Hospital Greenfield Capital Redevelopment Project** – New replacement hospital with a 24/7 emergency department, short stay inpatient unit, minor procedure room, and clinical and laboratory services to preserve core health care services in a rural region.
- **South Bruce Grey Health Centre – Kincardine Site Phase 1 Redevelopment Project** – Renovation and expansion of outdated facilities to accommodate growth in demand for health services.

Eastern

- **Kingston Health Sciences – Redevelopment Project** – Replacement of outdated facilities to accommodate inpatient, surgical, and emergency department growth in demand for health services.
- **Hôpital Montfort – Orléans Health Hub** – Co-location of community and ambulatory hospital services in a new-built facility to provide bilingual client-centred care.
- **Quinte Health Care Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital Redevelopment Project** – Replacement of the existing hospital on the Picton site with a new facility to meet increasing demand for health services in the area.
- **Carlington Community Health Centre** – Construction to consolidate the CHC's programs in Ottawa, including Primary Care, Mental Health and others into a new facility on the existing site.

Central

- **The Hospital for Sick Children – Project Horizon** – Planning for a new patient care tower to replace aging infrastructure, add new inpatient beds and expand clinical programs and services. Upon completion of the Patient Care Tower, the existing Atrium Wing will be renovated to allow for the consolidation of ambulatory care services.
- **Trillium Health Partners – Broader Redevelopment** – Construction of an inpatient care tower at the Queensway site in Etobicoke, and complete rebuild of the Mississauga hospital to increase capacity and address growth needs.
- **William Osler Health System – Peel Memorial Phase 2 Redevelopment** – Construction of a new inpatient wing to increase bed capacity in Brampton.
- **Collingwood General and Marine Hospital – Redevelopment** – Redevelopment and new construction to provide for growth in demand for health services.

Source: Ontario Ministry of Health.

Children's Treatment Centres

- Investing in New Children's Treatment Centres Ontario is providing additional funding to build a new treatment centre for children in Ottawa as part of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. The construction of a nearly 200,000-square-foot facility will reduce the need for families to travel to multiple facilities to gain access to critical programs and services, such as developmental care, autism services, and *occupational therapy*. Ontario is also investing in a new children's treatment centre in Chatham-Kent. This 55,000-square-foot facility will serve nearly 30,000 families and improve rehabilitative treatment for thousands of children with special needs.

Home and Community Care

- Provision of services support people of all ages who require care in their home, at school or in the community. This enables many people living with complex medical conditions to stay in their home. The modernization of Ontario's home and community care system is necessary to unlock the innovation required to improve services that patients, caregivers and service providers require to make the system more connected to the services that patients need. Ontario's plan to modernize home and community care will expand services through investment and additional staff, including PSWs. The *Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020*, introduced last year, integrates home and community care into broader health system legislation and recognizes that home and community care is a vital part of an integrated health care system and no longer a stand-alone service. Once proclaimed into force, this new legislation will ensure that home care becomes an essential part of service delivery within Ontario Health Teams, directly connecting patients to the various types of care they need and helping them navigate the health care system on a 24/7 basis.

Seniors

- *Helping Seniors Stay Safely in their Homes* In the 2020 Budget, Ontario announced the Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit for the 2021 tax year to provide support to seniors for improvements that make their homes safer and more accessible. The Seniors' Home Safety Tax Credit is worth 25 per cent of up to \$10,000 in eligible expenses for a senior's principal residence in Ontario. The maximum credit is \$2,500. Eligible expenses include grab bars and related reinforcements around the toilet, tub and shower, wheelchair ramps, stair lifts and elevators, as well as renovations to permit first floor occupancy or a secondary suite for a senior. This new tax credit will provide an estimated \$30 million in support and will benefit about 27,000 people, including seniors and people who live with senior relatives.

Children and Youth with Special Needs

- Children and youth with special needs, and their families, have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. School and service closures, as well as other restrictions, have limited children's access to some services, resulting in delays that can have significant long-term impacts on their health. To support children and youth with special needs to live happier and healthier lives, Ontario is investing \$240 million over four years, beginning in 2021–22. This investment will ensure that more children and families have access to critical services when they need them and build additional service capacity in early intervention rehabilitation and Preschool Speech and Language Program services.

Abilities Centre Whitby Ontario

- Ontario is investing an additional \$4.5 million over three years, beginning in 2021–22, to support the Abilities Centre in Whitby. This brings the government's total investment to \$6 million over three years. The Centre connects youth and adults with disabilities to employment

opportunities, supports employers in creating inclusive workplaces and promotes the value of inclusive hiring. Investments will also help people with disabilities develop community connections and build life skills that will support them in reaching their employment and personal goals.

Support to Parents

- The government is providing relief to parents with \$1.8 billion in direct payments as part of the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit. The Province is automatically providing a third round of payments to parents who received Support for Learners payments, which are now being doubled. Every eligible parent will receive \$400 for each child aged 0 to Grade 12, and \$500 for children and youth 21 years old or younger with special needs. Parents who had not applied for the previous payments will be able to submit an application for this third payment round. This unprecedented support is estimated to provide families \$980 million in relief on an urgent basis. This is in addition to the \$868 million in payments the government already provided to support parents in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To provide additional support to parents for child care expenses, the government is proposing a 20 per cent top-up to the Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses (CARE) tax credit for 2021. This would increase support for parents from \$1,250 to \$1,500, on average. Total support provided by this temporary top-up would be about \$75 million, and will help parents get back into the workforce and help make child care more affordable during this tough period.