

Ontario Budget 2018/19

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Overview of the Provincial Budget

At 4 p.m. today, the Ontario Minister of Finance Charles Sousa delivered Ontario's 2018/19 budget. The Budget, titled "A Plan for Care and Community," commits an additional \$20.3B over three years in "significant new investments in health care, child care, home care, and mental health, and new measures to create more job opportunities for people across the province." With the provincial election set for June 7, today's budget is expected to act as the blueprint laying out the priorities for the Ontario Liberals' campaign platform.

While the Budget actually forecasts a small fiscal operating surplus for the 2017/18 fiscal year (\$600M), the new spending commitments would return the province to deficit in fiscal 2018/19. The government is projecting deficits of \$6.7B in 2018/19, \$6.6B in 2019/20 and \$6.5B in 2020/21 before an eventual return to balance in 2024/25.

According to the government, the top 10 highlights of the 2018 Budget include:

1. Free Prescription Drugs for Everyone 65 and Over through OHIP+
2. More Child Care, More Choice (free child care for 2.5 year olds to JK)
3. New Ontario Drug & Dental Program
4. Seniors' Healthy Home Program
5. Stronger Hospitals, Better Care
6. Mental Health Matters
7. Home Care for Seniors
8. Removing Barriers for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities
9. Supporting Student Success with Free Tuition
10. Boosting the Minimum Wage and Creating Good Jobs

Health Care

Improving the province's health care system is a major thematic focus of the budget and new health initiatives comprise a majority of the government's identified "Budget Highlights." Indeed, increased spending for hospitals is the first area of new investment highlighted in Minister Sousa's budget speech.

Annual Health Spending Forecasts:

2017/18	\$58.3B
2018/19	\$61.3B (5.1% year over year increase)
2019/20	\$64.2B (4.7%)
2020/21	\$66.6B (3.7%)
Average of 4.7% annual growth 2017/18 - 2020/21	

Major investments / initiatives detailed in the budget include:

Hospitals

An additional \$822M investment in Ontario hospitals in 2018/19 – an increase of 4.6 per cent; first announced by Premier Wynne on March 22.

- \$305M for hospitals in high growth areas or with special needs (paediatrics, etc.)
- \$187M for more hospital beds
- \$95M to open new patient care spaces
- \$54M to expand access to specialized services like bariatrics, organ transplants
- \$48M for 26,000 more MRI hours and 14,000 new surgical and medical procedures
- \$40M for more cancer surgeries, endoscopies, chemotherapy treatments, etc.
- \$25M for more cardiac procedures
- \$5M for more critical care beds
- \$4M for stroke care
- Committing \$19B over 10 years for capital funding to build and renovate hospitals.
- \$10M for a Centre of Excellence in Health Care Artificial Intelligence with St Joe's Hamilton, Niagara Health System, McMaster and the Vector Institute.

OHIP+

- The Budget expands OHIP+ to eliminate the ODP co-pay and deductibles for Ontarians over 65. This follows the 2017 Budget commitment of free prescriptions for those under the age of 25.
- Starting August 1, 2019, anyone aged 65 or older will no longer have to pay a deductible or co-payment and would be able to present their eligible prescription and OHIP number at any Ontario pharmacy and receive their medication for free, saving the average Ontario senior \$240 every year.
- Medications for cholesterol, hypertension, thyroid conditions, diabetes and asthma are covered in this program.
- Costs are estimated at \$400M in 2019/20 and \$600M in 2020/21.
- The Ontario government mentioned it will continue to work with the federal government to explore a national pharmacare plan.

New Ontario Drug and Dental Program

- Reimbursing 80 per cent – up to a maximum of \$400 per single person, \$600 per couple and \$700 for a family of four with two children – of eligible prescription drug and dental expenses each year, for those without workplace health benefits or not covered by OHIP+ or other government programs.

Mental Health & Addictions

- \$2.1B over four years for additional investment in mental health and addictions (first announced March 21 by Premier Wynne). Funding includes:
 - Increasing access to publicly funded structured psychotherapy in primary settings and through mental health and addictions community agencies.
 - Providing standardized training to primary care teams and community mental health and addictions agencies so they can provide high-quality structured psychotherapy services.
 - Also boosting the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy through an investment of \$570M over four years to improve community services across Ontario.
 - Investment of \$175M over four years to expand school-based supports for mental health and addictions services.

Long-Term Care

- 30,000 new LTC beds over next decade; 5,000 new beds by 2022 (first announced November 2017).
- \$300M over three years in new funding, starting with \$50M in 2018/19 to hire a RN for every home and reach average of four hours of care by 2022.
- Every home will have staff with specialized training in behavioural supports and in palliative and end of life care.

Home Care

- \$650M for home care over three years.
 - \$180M for new volume – 2.8M more hours of personal support & caregiver respite, 284,000 more nursing visits, 58,000 more therapy visits. Half of this funding is to address demographic changes; half is to provide more service to more complex clients (Maple 4/5).
 - \$5M for improved digital information and connection.
 - \$45M for rate increases for nursing and PSW services (2 per cent for nursing, 1 per cent for PSW).

Supporting PSWs

- \$23M over three years to add 5,500 PSWs in under-served areas. Money will support new models (F/T pay for PSWs), and enhanced grants for individuals interested in entering PSW workforce.
- \$38M over three years in new funding to support PSW training and education.
- \$65M over three years for an investment in PSW retirement security. Government will provide initial contribution and matching of up to 2.5 per cent of income through a TFSA retirement plan.

Support for Caregivers

- Launching new caregiver organization in spring 2018.
- \$75M over three years to support palliative and end-of-life care.
- Easier system navigation for caregivers.

Palliative care

- Investing an additional \$15M in 2018-19 to improve access to community-based palliative care.
- Improving access to community-based end-of-life services by completing the government's goal of opening 20 new residential hospices across Ontario.
- Palliative care training for health service providers working in First Nation and urban Indigenous communities.
- More non-medical supports to patients and caregivers in the community through an additional investment to providers of visiting hospice volunteer services.

Other Commitments:

- **New Seniors' Healthy Home Program** - Provides benefit of up to \$750 annually for eligible households led by seniors 75 and over to help them live independently and offset the costs of their home maintenance (such as snow shoveling, lawn care, etc.).
- **Rowan's Law: Concussion prevention** - A commitment of \$5M over three years to support implementation of the recently-passed concussion safety legislation.
- **Ontario's Strategy to Combat the Opioid Crisis** - An investment of more than \$222M in the implementation of the Strategy to Prevent Opioid Addiction and Overdose.
- **Ontario's Life Sciences Venture Capital Fund** – Signed MOU with Quebec to develop a joint Life Sciences Venture Capital Fund; includes \$50M in venture capital funds focused on life sciences, ensuring that companies in subsectors such as regenerative medicine, oncology and digital health will have access to capital for their growth.

Notable Omissions:

- No reference of physician negotiations or expanded access to physician services.
- No new notable investments for primary care beyond Budget 2017 commitments.
- Little mention of community support services.
- Little focus on digital health (besides small investments in AI and community care).