

Niagara Region Provincial Candidates Polled on Poverty and Social Justice Issues ~ September 2011

The Social Assistance Reform Network of Niagara (SARNN) is a network of front line health and social agencies, churches, organizations and individuals who have worked together since 1988 to advocate for social assistance reforms. SARNN is a supporter of the non-partisan Poverty Free Ontario campaign being held across Ontario in nearly 20 communities. In order to gain a better understanding of the positions of the candidates in all four Niagara ridings on key issues that are relevant to the health and well-being of our communities, and, in particular, people living in poverty, we posed five questions – please read below along with responses received from candidates from the Green Party of Ontario, Ontario Libertarian Party, Ontario Liberal Party, Communist Party, and Ontario New Democratic Party.

	1. The Commission to Review Ontario Social Assistance is now underway. Commissioner Frances Lankin has stated that the system, which serves over 800000 Ontarians, needs more than "tinkering", it needs a major overhaul. What specific changes would you recommend to the Commission regarding the current social assistance system to ensure the system is improved?	2. The Low Income Cut Off lines used by our Federal Government and Statistics Canada report that a single person is living below the poverty line when their annual income is below \$13000. A single adult receiving Ontario Works receives \$598/month, which is only \$7176 per year – far below the poverty line. Over 40 Ontario MPPs have "Done the Math" and agree that the rates are too low and inadequate. Do you feel current social assistance rates are adequate and acceptable? If not, how should the rates be set? Would you support adding an immediate \$100 healthy food supplement to social assistance rates?	3. In 2009 all Ontario parties supported Bill 152, An Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario. The current strategy has a goal of reducing child poverty by 25% in five years. How would you build on the current strategy and what goal and policies would you and your party set for the next five years in order to ensure <u>all</u> people living in poverty are included?	4. Low income adults (either working poor or receiving social assistance) do not have access to preventive dental services. Poor oral health is a detriment to overall physical and mental health, as well as a barrier to employment and social inclusion. We need to put the mouth back into the body. Will your party commit to extending preventive dental coverage to all low income Ontario adults within the next 12 months?	5. Approximately 12.4 percent of Canadian households live in housing that requires major repairs, is overcrowded, and/or costs more than 30 percent of household income. Moreover, an estimated 300,000 people are living without homes in Canada. Locally, the Niagara Region Housing Authority has 5, 381 households with 9,800 people on a waiting list for subsidized housing. Having a safe and affordable place to live can be a stepping stone out of poverty. Does your Party support a fully-funded national housing strategy that respects provincial jurisdictions, as well as support to maintain existing federal subsidies for social housing units? Would you support a housing benefit for low income Ontarians? If so, what would it entail?
Jim Bradley, Ontario Liberal Party, St. Catharines Riding candidate	Unlike the Tories, whose first act in government was to axe social assistance by 22% and kick people off of the program, Ontario Liberals have sought to improve opportunities and the well-being of social assistance recipients since 2003. We have been working hard to reverse the damage	Since 2003, we have increased social assistance rates seven times and will have provided an additional \$1.8 billion to social assistance clients and their families by the end of this year. We know that Social Assistance is about more than just cash benefits - it's about	Ontario Liberals understand poverty is an issue facing many Ontarians and that is why we have made poverty reduction a priority. We introduced Ontario's first-ever Poverty Reduction Strategy, with a target to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent over five years. We also made poverty reduction a long-term	Ontario Liberals agree that access to dental service is an important contributor to physical and mental health. Despite the economic downturn and the tough fiscal situation we took conclusive action to expand access to public dental service for those in need. We launched a strategy to	Ontario Liberals have invested more toward affordable housing than any previous government. To date, we have invested more than \$2.5 billion for repairs, new construction and rent supplements. Through our investments, we have built and repaired more than 270,000 units and provided 35,000 supplements. Our

	<p>done by the Tories by increasing supports to help recipients move towards independence and self-sufficiency.</p> <p>We've increased rates, simplified rules around earnings exemptions, so the more you work, the more money you keep; removed punitive social assistance rules – like the lifetime ban; increased the maximum deduction for informal child care costs; created employment benefits; and extended drug, dental and vision care benefits for people leaving social assistance for employment.</p> <p>We believe our programs can and should do more to eliminate barriers for people working to improve their lives. And we want to make those changes. That's why Ontario Liberals launched the largest Social Assistance review in Ontario in 20 years. Through the Review, we are listening to Ontarians to determine how we can make these programs more responsive to the people who need help and to provide more opportunities for them to take part in their communities & the economy.</p> <p>The intent of the review is to help develop a concrete action plan that will make social assistance: better at getting people into jobs; easier to understand; work better with other federal, provincial and municipal programs; more sustainable; better support those who are unable to attach to the workforce. We remain committed to providing low-income families with a pathway out of poverty and assisting families to move from social assistance to employment more easily.</p>	<p>supporting people and their families to get ahead, through a range of programs and initiatives from across government. These include drug, dental and other health benefits, employment training and supports, child care subsidies, to name a few.</p> <p>There is more work to be done. That is why, through the largest review of Social Assistance in 20 years, we will be looking at all aspects of the system, and how it interacts with other parts of Ontario's income security system, to improve the outcomes for low-income Ontarians. This includes looking at whether a \$100 a month food supplement for those on social assistance would be the most effective way to help. The Review will be releasing its final report next summer, and we look forward to seeing the recommendations.</p>	<p>priority for successive governments by enshrining this commitment in legislation through the Poverty Reduction Act, 2009.</p> <p>We have been able to make real progress through our strategy by implementing initiatives to ensure kids have every opportunity to succeed. The Ontario Child Benefit is providing up to \$1,100 per child per year to over one million kids and is helping families move from social assistance to employment more easily. We have committed to increase this to \$1,310 by 2013. Full Day Kindergarten is saving families up to \$6,500 a year on child care. We will ensure that it is available in every school by 2014. As part of our comprehensive tax reforms, 90,000 low-income Ontarians no longer have to pay any personal income tax. We have raised the minimum wage seven times to \$10.25 – an increase of 50 per cent, after being frozen for 9 years by the Tories. We've almost quadrupled the Student Nutrition Program – now serving 600,000 kids so they can focus on school, not their hunger. We will expand this even further by providing all elementary school children with a healthy snack.</p> <p>We have invested more toward affordable housing than any previous government. To date, we have invested more than \$2.5 billion to build and repair more than 270,000 units and provide 35,000 supplements, benefiting more than 680,000 low-income Ontarians since 2003. We also just negotiated an agreement with the federal government that guarantees new, four-year funding for affordable housing in Ontario, which will see \$480.6 million invested in Ontario's housing stock — with \$240.3 million</p>	<p>ensure that children from low-income families could get access to preventative and emergency dental services.</p> <p>Healthy Smiles, a program we created in 2010, helps children and youth from low-income families who have no access to dental coverage. It covers dental services such as checkups, cleaning, fillings and X-rays and benefits 130,000 children and youth under 18 years of age. We have also expanded access to the Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT) program for children who require treatment for serious oral problems that might otherwise have gone untreated. CINOT now provides publicly-reimbursed service to over 40,000 low-income children per year. Ontario Liberals believe that focusing our efforts on children makes sense. Ensuring that kids have access to dental treatment as they grow up will help ensure they have healthy teeth and gums as adults. The service will help prevent avoidable mental and physical health problems that that perpetuate a cycle of poverty and create problems for individuals and our communities.</p> <p>We recognise that there are currently a plethora of over-lapping dental services for low-income Ontarians, including those on ODSP and Ontario Works. If re-elected, Ontario Liberals will look to integrate public dental services to ensure equitable and streamlined access for those in need. We will look for opportunities to expand coverage of our services where fiscally possible.</p>	<p>investments have benefited more than 680,000 low-income Ontarians since 2003.</p> <p>We recently negotiated an agreement with the federal government that guarantees new, four-year funding for affordable housing in Ontario. This agreement will see \$480.6 million invested in Ontario's housing stock — with \$240.3 million coming from the provincial government — and will provide local governments with funding for an array of housing options and the flexibility to design strategies across the housing continuum based on local needs and priorities. The Regional Municipality of Niagara will receive \$13,159,828 under this agreement.</p> <p>Next, we'll consider delivering a new housing benefit for Ontarians who are struggling and we will ask our experts working on the Social Assistance review to develop options.</p> <p>In this election, we are the only party to responsibly address affordable housing in our platform. And after repeatedly voting against our strategic housing investments, and then ignoring the issue for most of this election campaign, the NDP has finally spent one afternoon of the campaign addressing poverty and housing, without the presence of their party leader. Their plan proposes no new ideas – they are just following our lead – and attaching an unrealistic long-term target for new units, without any way to pay for it.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the PCs stated that they intend “to get out of the non-profit and co-op housing business.” This is consistent with their record of downloading affordable housing to local municipalities without the funding to meet housing needs.</p> <p>Ontario Liberals are the first to develop a Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy</p>
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			<p>coming from the provincial government. And we will continue to work with our partners to identify opportunities to help create affordable housing. Because of these investments, we have seen a significant shift of single-parent families moving off of social assistance, from 42 per cent of cases in 2002 to only 30 per cent. In fact, a single mom with a small child working full-time at minimum wage has seen her income increase by \$10,500 since 2003.</p> <p>According to Stats Can, the poverty rate for children in Ontario has declined — despite the recession — from 15.2 per cent in 2008 to 14.6 per cent in 2009. This means 19,000 kids have been lifted out of poverty. And the poverty rate for single parents also dropped dramatically, from 43.2 per cent in 2008 to 35.2 per cent.</p> <p>By focusing our efforts to ensure children have every opportunity to succeed in life, we are breaking the cycle of poverty and building a more prosperous province for us all. And we know there is more to do.</p> <p>Ontario Liberals have shown leadership in tackling poverty — and we will continue to make poverty reduction a priority going forward. We are the only party in this election that has committed to developing a renewed poverty reduction strategy and target in our next mandate.</p>		<p>(LTAHS) and are committed to ensuring the resources are available. It provides greater flexibility to local governments so that they can create plans for housing delivery that are reflective of their unique local needs.</p> <p>The future of housing depends on sustained long-term funding that is fair and will help meet the needs of Ontario. We will continue to actively lobby the federal government for a long-term deal and a national housing strategy.</p>
<p>Donna Cridland, Green Party of Ontario, Welland Riding candidate</p>	<p>I would look at all of the recommendations from the Commission with a view to ensuring housing and healthy food access are fully addressed.</p>	<p>No [not adequate]. Yes, our Ontario Food and Farming Strategy and our plan to "Feed our communities by championing local farms" will include programs like comprehensive school food programs.</p>	<p>I believe that housing must be more accessible - and we would work with municipalities and developers to ensure new communities are more inclusive. In addition, our Ontario Food and Farming Strategy and our plan to "Feed our communities by championing local</p>	<p>We will find needed capacity in our existing health system, and provide \$1.6 billion to health care over the next 4 years.</p>	<p>The Green Party recognizes that all Ontarians should have access to safe, secure housing. We are committed to confronting the lifestyle and environmental issues facing us today, so that we can develop, healthy livable communities that are safe for everyone. The Green Party</p>

			<p>farms" will include programs like comprehensive school food programs. It will also provide tax incentives for farmers who donate to charitable food programs.</p>		<p>supports setting a target for affordable units in new housing developments, to encourage a mix of housing alternatives in every community. By incorporating these targets into the building permit process, we can set a level playing field for all developers. This issue requires provincial leadership, to ensure that there is a consistent process for all municipalities.</p>
<p>Donna-Lynne Hamilton, Ontario Libertarian Party, Welland Riding candidate</p>	<p>I believe that the entire system needs to be replaced. It does not do the job it was originally designed to do. Input needs to be presented to the Commission from those who have used Social Assistance. For that I would have a "town hall" meeting to get input from my constituents. That said, I personally would propose a guaranteed annual income, based on family size and related poverty levels. Now we put the "purchasing power" in the hands of the people where it belongs, instead of under government control.</p>	<p>I believe that the Social Assistance program be replaced with a guaranteed annual income of a minimum of \$10,000.00, based on family size and poverty levels. In the interim, I would support adding a \$100 food supplement to the rates immediately.</p>	<p>Not only are those who are on Social Assistance living in poverty, but so are many working people. At minimum wage, a working person makes approximately \$21,000 per annum, however, according to the Fraser Institute calculator, 1/3 of that is paid out in taxes! Their spendable income is now below the poverty line. Out of that spendable income, a working person has to pay for costs related to employment e.g. gas!</p> <p>I believe that we should provide a guaranteed annual income of a minimum of \$10,000.00. Employment costs should be deductible for income tax purposes.</p> <p>Also, I propose a negative income tax for every man, woman and child in the province of \$10000 per annum to be used to pay for health/dental insurance, schooling etc. The child's money would be held in trust by the parent, with the trust being accountable for how the money is spent.</p>	<p>I do not believe that the government should be in the "health care" business. Government's job is to serve and protect. With a negative income tax for every man, woman and child, then the individual(s)/parents can choose what insurance is purchased for including health and dental care.</p>	<p>The Ontario Libertarian Party believes in choice. The choice people have to choose where they live and how they live. The government should not be directly involved in housing.</p> <p>From a landlord's perspective there must be money available to do repairs. As a landlord, if I cannot get enough in rent to cover my expenses related to the building, then I cannot invest in repairs. Any reasonable landlord, does not want his property to decline in value. Most individual landlords lose money or barely meet expenses, never mind meeting the costs of repairs. When a unit is not taken care of by the tenant, dollars are taken from regular building maintenance and repairs and spent on repairing damage done by the tenant!</p> <p>From a tenants perspective, other people's definition of "overcrowding" is not necessarily ours. Not everyone wants a home, not everyone wants to own a house. Not everyone wishes to live alone. Not everyone cares about the conditions they live in. It is an individual's choice on how they live and where they live. There are mechanisms in place to address these substandard housing issues. People need to be informed on how to use those mechanisms.</p> <p>The underlying issue is income – not the cost of housing. I know home owners who pay more than 30% of their after tax dollars for a modest home. These same</p>

					<p>people find it difficult to pay for home repairs. Do we ignore those working home owners? We need to be able to put dollars back in the control of the people. When people have more income to spend, they can choose to house themselves in better housing. When people are taxed, there is less income available to provide themselves with decent housing. As long as someone will rent substandard housing, there is no incentive for some landlords to improve their units. Using more government money to fund a national housing strategy, or a housing benefit will only result in taking more money from people in taxes. Instead we to put money back into people's pockets, and let people be responsible for their choices of how and where they live.</p>
<p>Irene Lowell, Ontario New Democratic Party, St. Catharines Riding candidate</p>	<p>We are not recommending anything to the Commission. We feel its important they have the opportunity to complete their work without suggestions--good or bad--from the political parties. Ultimately, the Commission's recommendations will affect those on social assistance and front-line workers so we believe it's those people the Commission should be hearing from. Once the Commission issues its report, we're looking forward to implementing their recommendations.</p>	<p>We do not believe the current rates for OW and ODSP are adequate or acceptable. An NDP government will increase these rates to keep up with inflation. In addition, we will increase the Work-Related Benefit for all ODSP recipients with employment earnings and end the clawback on the first \$300 a month of earnings for ODSP recipients who take a job. As a first act, however, we would follow through on our previous commitment to introduce the \$100 healthy food supplement.</p>	<p>Our Party is making a number of commitments that will benefit ALL persons living in poverty. We have said since the Liberals introduced Bill 152 that their decision to exclude adults living in poverty was extremely short-sighted. That said, the NDP has a strong platform that involves making housing more affordable by implementing a new housing benefit for low-income tenants paying unaffordable rates. As part of this housing benefit, a single parents of two children receiving OW paying \$847 a month in rent would receive a monthly housing benefit of \$189. A working parents with two children earning \$2,200 a month paying \$800 in rent would receive a monthly housing benefit of \$103.</p> <p>We will also fund and build more than 50,000 new affordable housing units over the next 10 years, including over 14,000 during the first term. We will invest \$1.1 billion over 10 years</p>	<p>As stated in Answer 3, an NDP government will create an emergency care dental program for unemployed and working poor adults. Similar in mandate to the Children in Need of Treatment program, it will service Dental coverage for low-income adults. The program will serve about 50,000 adults each year at a cost of \$12.5 million, using unspent funds from the government's 2008 Healthy Smiles Ontario.</p>	<p>As previously answered, the NDP supports a fully-funded national housing strategy and to show our commitment our government would start with a \$240 million provincial investment. As well, we would implement a new housing benefit for low-income tenants who are paying unaffordable rents. In 2016-17, when fully phased-in, this housing benefit will provide an average of \$96 a month for individuals who pay more than 40% of their income on rent and an average of \$120 for those paying more than 30% of their income on rent. The benefit will cost \$240 million annually when fully phased-in and will vary according to city size, family size, a tenant's income and rent paid. About 200,000 Ontarians will receive assistant through this housing benefit.</p> <p>As a Party, we would like to do more, but we're constrained by the size of the provincial deficit and competing challenges. As the situation improves, we will work to make life more affordable for ALL Ontarians.</p>

			<p>partnering with the federal government on Affordable Housing Programs. This partnership starts with a provincial investment of \$240 million. We will improve access to low-cost financing for affordable housing construction, renovation and repairs by making it easier for housing providers to access the Infrastructure Ontario Affordable Housing Loan Fund. Social housing providers (including co-ops and non-profit providers) will qualify for retrofit grants as part of our \$300 million low-income energy efficiency program. In addition, we will follow through on a previous commitment to allow municipalities to adopt inclusionary housing practices.</p> <p>While housing is important, there are other commitments that will help peoples' lives. These include creating an emergency care dental program for unemployed and working poor adults. The mandate would be similar to the Children in Need of Treatment program, but it will service low-income adults. For the working poor, we will increase the minimum wage to \$11 an hour and index it to the cost of living. And we will freeze child care fees and keep spaces open.</p>		
<p>Saleh Waziruddin, Communist Party, St. Catharines Riding candidate</p>	<p>i) immediately double rates across the board and eliminate clawbacks ii) introduce an inflation-indexed Guaranteed Annual Income above the poverty line iii) construct 200,000 units of social housing over 5 years iv) increase funding for shelters and transitional housing v) restore the Special Diet Allowance (but this is not enough, items i and ii are needed) vi) increase EI to cover 90% of previous earning for the duration of</p>	<p>Current social assistance rates are neither adequate nor acceptable. The \$100 healthy food supplement is an unacceptable substitute for the Special Diet Allowance which should be restored, the Communist Party opposed and continues to oppose its elimination. However even the Special Diet Allowance is not enough to address hunger and starvation, which is why the Communist Party calls for doubling the rates and providing a Guaranteed Annual Income above the poverty line indexed to inflation.</p>	<p>The Communist Party goals and policies are to double the rates and then institute a Guaranteed Annual Income above the poverty line indexed to inflation, anything less does not solve the problem that the rates are starvation rates. With regards to "Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy",</p> <p>i) the rent banks are in fact a public subsidy to landlords and should be replaced by rent roll-backs and effective rent control legislation with</p>	<p>We do commit to extending preventive dental coverage to all low income Ontario adults within the next 12 months, but also call for expanding public health care to dental, vision, pharma, and long-term care as fully funded, fully comprehensive, and fully public. Private dental insurance is neither equitable not adequate because of co-pays and payment limits per tooth.</p>	<p>The Communist Party supports a fully-funded Canada-wide housing strategy with the federal and provincial governments building and providing public and social housing and having housing uploaded to them. We don't believe provinces should be allowed to go without social housing as was done under Harris. In Ontario we call for a minimum of 200,000 social housing units built in the next 5 years and another 200,000 after. Rather than a housing benefit, which is effectively a public subsidy to landlords, we believe housing should be treated as a public utility that</p>

	<p>unemployment, including first-time job seekers (Guaranteed Annual Income) with a minimum wage of \$19/hour</p> <p>vii) public child care with \$7/day fees</p> <p>viii) public dental, vision, pharma, and long-term care as well as 100% funded 100% public health care including mental health care</p> <p>ix) upload welfare, housing, education, health care, and public transit costs to levels of government which can tax corporations enjoying record profits so they pay their fair share</p> <p>x) increase federal funding for public transit and reduce fares</p>		<p>enforcement such that no one pays more than 25% of their income for housing.</p> <p>ii) with regards to the education section of the strategy, the Communist Party calls for eliminating post-secondary tuition fees, something which even many capitalist countries have done such as Germany and Brazil</p> <p>iii) the Rapid Re-employment Training Service is only of limited value if there is increasing unemployment and the jobs that are available don't provide an adequate income. Plant closing legislation including public tribunals with enforcement powers to review plant closings and nationalize profitable plants that would otherwise be closed can help prevent the hemorrhage of jobs. We call for extending EI to cover the duration of unemployment, provide 90% of previous earning, and to cover first time job seekers (paid a Guaranteed Annual Income).</p>		<p>affordably and equitably allows everyone to live in dignity which is something the market has not and will not provide. We are opposed to federal and provincial governments allowing landlords to speculate and profiteer from working people and call for rent roll-backs and rent control such that rent does not exceed 25% of income.</p>
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