



Centralizing social assistance: Big promises, new barriers

Over the past year, the Ontario government made big changes to how people apply for Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Many tasks that local offices used to handle were moved into a single province-wide department. This is called centralization. These changes are part of the Ontario government's Social Assistance Renewal plan. The government is also focusing more on digital services, including encouraging people to apply for benefits online, and to get all their documents online using MyBenefits.

In the past, people could visit their local office to apply for benefits. Now, most applications for benefits are reviewed by a centralized intake centre. It used to be that if someone disagreed with a decision about their benefits, they could speak directly with staff at the local office to try to resolve the issue. This is also changing.

We are seeing centralization create new challenges. Not everyone has reliable phone or internet access, or the digital skills needed to deal with issues online or over the phone. These new processes can be harder for people with disabilities or those who need help understanding forms and letters.

When services are handled far from the local community it may be more difficult to understand local contexts

and make good referrals. We are also seeing long delays for clients waiting to hear back from centralized OW or ODSP services.

Some examples of the problems we have been seeing:

- Clients applying for OW or ODSP are incorrectly told they are not eligible for benefits.



- Clients applying for ODSP are waiting much longer to hear back on their application.
- Clients approved for ODSP are waiting much longer for ODSP benefits to start, and we are seeing more mistakes in how retroactive

benefits are calculated. This is particularly true for clients who are not on OW at the time of transfer.

- Clients who request a review of a decision are supposed to get a decision within 30 days, but they are waiting 60-90 days or even more.

Efforts to centralize social assistance programs were meant to make services simpler and more efficient. While these changes may have improved the experience for some people, we are seeing this create new barriers for many clients who need these services the most.

Things that used to work well when they were handled by the local offices do not seem to work at all anymore, or they take much longer. Our view is that programs like OW and ODSP are meant to help people and should not make it harder for people to get support.

We are working with legal clinics across the province to bring these challenges to the government's attention. We are hopeful that some solutions are on the way.

In the meantime, if you are having any problems with OW or ODSP centralized services, please call us for help.



Employment Insurance (EI) updates

EI Temporary Measures Extended

The Government announced that temporary EI measures to provide greater supports for workers whose jobs were impacted by US tariffs would be extended.

The temporary measures originally slated to end on April 11, 2026, have been extended to October 10, 2026.

These temporary measures for EI benefits include:

- removal of the one week waiting period (for claims between March 30, 2025, and October 10, 2026)
- no deduction of severance or other separation payments on leaving your job (for claims between March 30, 2025, and October 10, 2026)
- additional 20 weeks of EI regular benefits if you receive regular benefits and

(a) you have less than 36 weeks of EI regular or fishing benefits in the past 3 years before your claim;

(b) you paid at least 30% of the annual maximum EI premium for 7 of the 10 years before your claim (for claims between June 15, 2025, and October 10, 2026)

For more information contact your local Service Canada office or visit:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/temporary-measures-for-major-economic-conditions.html>.

Launch of Employment Insurance Board of Appeal

Starting April 1, 2026, employment insurance appeals of reconsideration decisions from Service Canada must be filed with the new Employment Insurance Board of Appeal. For appeals filed before April 1, 2026, these appeals will continue with the Social Security Tribunal – General Division.

At the EI Board of Appeal, appellants can request a hearing in person, by telephone or by video conference. In-person hearings will be available at select Service Canada locations in Ontario, including Belleville and Bancroft. The Board will be comprised of a presiding member and members from the employers' and workers' communities.

For more information on the EI Board of Appeal and appeal process, visit:

<https://eiboac-aeae.service.canada.ca/en/index.shtml>.

Migrant farm workers rights: Discrimination and exclusion from EI

On February 23, 2026, the Ontario Superior Court certified the *Palmer v. Attorney General of Canada*, 2026 ONSC 927 class action. The representative

plaintiffs have brought the class action on behalf of thousands of Mexican and Caribbean farm workers in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP).

The class action is challenging the SAWP program for violating workers' rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and for denying access to Employment Insurance benefits.

The case argues that SAWP work permit restrictions, which require workers to work and reside with a specific employer for a limited period, increases risk of abuse and isolation and is discriminatory based on race and nationality.

In addition, despite SAWP workers paying EI premiums, SAWP workers are effectively denied access to EI due to the requirement that they leave Canada at the end of their seasonal employment. The action claims that not only have the SAWP workers been denied a benefit, but the Government has been unjustly enriched by this exclusion by collecting EI payments but not paying-out EI benefits to these workers.

The class action, brought by Goldblatt Partners LLP, along with Martinez Law and Koskie Minsky LLP, will proceed to adjudication on the merits.

If you are experiencing problems with EI or other employment-related issues, please call us.

Minimum wage increasing in October 2026

The Ontario government is again raising the minimum wage. Effective October 1, 2026, the minimum wage will increase to \$17.95 /hour, benefiting more than 700,000 workers across the province.

Learn more: <https://www.Ontario.ca/minimumwage>



Car buyer beware!

In Ontario, consumer protection laws such as the *Consumer Protection Act, 2002* and the *Sale of Goods Act, 1990*, govern most non-commercial, personal and/or household transactions for goods and services. These laws set out a business's responsibilities and a consumer's rights and remedies.

However, in the context of motor vehicle purchases, consumer protections are limited, and buyers are expected to take necessary precautions before purchasing vehicles, particularly used vehicles.

Consumers can cancel a purchase agreement only in limited circumstances. For example: if a dealer fails to provide information required by law or if they engage in unfair practices, such as deceiving or misleading a consumer.

Importantly, outside of these limited circumstances, a consumer does not have a right to change their mind and cancel a contract – there is **no cooling off period**.

These **consumer protections do not apply to private sales** and are limited to the purchase of vehicles from dealers registered with the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC). As such, the purchase of used vehicles from friends, family, or strangers on Facebook Marketplace may leave consumers with few legal remedies if the vehicle is defective or an agreement is breached.

More recently, there has been a call for the introduction of "lemon laws", i.e. laws to protect consumers who purchase vehicles that are defective or not fit for their intended use, or that fail to meet safety standards. However, no lemon laws currently exist in Ontario. This places the burden on consumers to take necessary precautions prior to the purchase of vehicles, especially used vehicles.

Here are 5 precautions consumers may take:

1. Check that the dealer is registered with OMVIC. If they are a private seller, request a

Used Vehicle Information Package (UVIP), which they are required to provide by law.

2. Confirm that the dealer or seller owns the vehicle and that there is no lien registered, or money owed on the vehicle.
3. Obtain a vehicle history report from CARFAX Canada, which will list the vehicle's accident history and any manufacturer recalls, among other things.
4. Before purchase, test drive the vehicle and have it inspected by a mechanic.
5. Request a written purchase agreement and get independent legal advice prior to signing.

If you suspect that you have purchased a defective vehicle, your purchase agreement has been breached, or our consumer rights have been violated, contact CALC for free legal advice.



Expanding housing protection for survivors of gender-based violence

An important decision by Ontario's Divisional Court, *Browne v. Henley Crescent*, expands the rights of gender-based violence survivors to remain in rental housing.

The facts of the case are similar to the circumstances many survivors experience. The tenant had lived in a rental unit since 2012 with her husband and two children. In September 2023 he was removed from the home by police after an incident of intimate partner violence. Five months later, the husband signed a Notice to End Tenancy on the unit, believing that he

was only ending any responsibility he had to pay the rent. In fact, he was the only named tenant on the rental agreement and, based on the notice, the landlord received an order from the Landlord and Tenant Board to evict the wife and her children from the unit. The landlord said the only way she could stay is by paying double rent.

On appeal, the Divisional Court ruled that in certain circumstances, a spouse who has experienced intimate partner violence can remain in a rental unit, paying the same rent rather than an increase as if they were a new tenant.

The decision is an important step forward in protecting the rights of survivors. As well as protecting a group of survivors, it more broadly affirms that tenant protection, particularly for those vulnerable to housing instability, is the key purpose of the *Residential Tenancies Act*. This case should guide the Landlord Tenant Board when it considers eviction orders.

If you are a spouse or other person facing eviction, contact CALC for more information and advice.

CALC News is published semi-annually by:

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY & LEGAL CENTRE

158 George Street, Level 1
Belleville, Ontario K8N 3H2

Phone: 613-966-8686
Toll-Free Phone: 1-877-966-8686
Fax: 613-966-6251
Email: contact@calc.clcj.ca

www.communitylegalcentre.ca

 <http://x.com/calctweets>


 <http://www.facebook.com/CommunityLegalCentre>

 Get our newsletters by email! Email us at contact@calc.clcj.ca or sign up on our website.

Positive Space



CALC is a place where human rights are respected and where Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people, and their friends and allies, are welcomed and supported.

 **DONATE NOW** Charitable Reg. No: 12464 4121 RR0001
Donations appreciated!

We do FREE Public Legal Education Sessions! Call us to speak to your group, or scan the QR code & email us.



SCAN ME

Your community legal clinic



Canadian Dental Care Plan – Don't forget to renew!



If you currently have dental plan coverage under the CDCP, you need to renew your coverage between April 15 and June 1, 2026, for the new 2026-2027 coverage period. If you don't renew by June 1, your existing coverage **will end June 30**.

If you miss the deadline to renew, you will need to submit a **new** application and you could experience a gap in coverage during this time.

Renewals are available online through a Service Canada account. If you can't apply online or have questions, contact Service Canada toll-free at 1-833-537-4342 (TTY: 1-833-677-6262). You can also ask someone you trust to help you apply.

New applicants can apply starting June 2, 2026.

For more information, visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/dental/dental-care-plan.html>.

New Canada Groceries and Essential Benefit (formerly GST/HST Credit)

A new one-time top-up payment will be issued to eligible and entitled recipients of the January 2026 payment of the GST/HST credit no later than June 2026. The Government of Canada will also increase the Canada Groceries and Essentials Benefit (formerly the GST/HST credit) by 25% for 5 years starting in July 2026.

Combined, these measures mean a family of 4 will receive up to \$1,890 this year, and about \$1,400 annually for the next 4 years; and a single person will receive up to \$950 this year, and about \$700 annually for the next 4 years.

Learn more: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2026/02/legislation-passes-to-deliver-new-canada-groceries-and-essentials-benefit.html>

RECENT WIN



On April 1, 2026, Federal Minimum Wage increases to:

\$18.15 / HOUR

This applies **only** to work that is federally regulated like:

Truck Driving* Federal Public Service

Rail* Postal/Courier Services

Telecommunications Air Transport

Banks Shipping* Radio/Television

*when crossing provincial or international borders

Please Note: if the provincial or territorial minimum wage where you work is higher (e.g., Yukon \$18.51/hour), then that is what a federally regulated worker must be paid.

Join us as a Board member!

If you would like to support the clinic, or know someone that might be interested in supporting the clinic, by standing for election to our Board of Directors, you can find out more on our [website](http://www.communitylegalcentre.ca), or contact our Office Manager, Lynda Morgan, at ext. 25 or email lynda.morgan@calc.clcj.ca.

We are also seeking Board members with a strong financial background and knowledge.