

VOTER EDUCATION

Key Issues in Durham Region – 2025 Ontario Provincial Election

Produced by: CDCD Community Development Team

Healthcare

Durham residents face several challenges with healthcare, including:

- **Shortage of family doctors:** In March 2024, over 80,000 Durham residents did not have a family doctor. The Ontario College of Family Physicians reported that this number could increase to 152,000 people by 2026. This shortage is worse in low-income urban areas and rural areas such as Uxbridge and Scugog.
- **Long surgical wait times:** The average wait time for some essential surgeries is over 200 days, or over 6 ½ months.
- **Shortage of mental health services:** The need for affordable mental health services has increased. Between 2021 and 2022, 25% of residents surveyed reported moderate to severe depression symptoms.
- **Opioid crisis:** From 2013 to 2021, Durham Region reported a sevenfold increase in the rate of overdose deaths.

The Ontario government oversees and manages the healthcare system in the province. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Address the shortage of family physicians so all residents have a family doctor?
- Decrease the long wait times for essential surgeries?
- Address the rising opioid-related deaths and addiction in Durham?
- Increase affordable mental health services in our region?
- Address unequal healthcare in Durham's rural and low-income urban areas?

Homelessness & Housing

Durham Region is currently facing an affordable housing crisis that has increased the risk of homelessness for many. Issues such as the **shortage of affordable housing, insufficient income supports and a lack of mental health and addiction services** are the main contributors to the rise of homelessness in the past two decades. Here are some homelessness facts:

- In 2024, over 80,000 people experienced homelessness in Ontario (25% rise since 2022).
- Over 268,000 households are currently on affordable housing waitlists in Ontario.
- Average wait times for affordable housing in Ontario varies from five years to 20 years. In Durham, 8,284 people were on the waitlist in 2022.
- In 2022, 1,446 people in Durham were forced to use homeless shelters.
- Without action to resolve this problem, the number of homeless individuals could potentially triple within the next decade.

The Ontario government, through the Ministry of Housing, manages housing initiatives and homelessness relief efforts. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Increase efforts to address homelessness in Durham Region?
- Create more affordable housing options in Durham?
- Fund the construction of new affordable housing?
- Address the significant gaps in accessing mental health and addiction services?
- Contribute to the Region's initiatives that address Durham's encampment issue by providing supportive services?

Childcare

Parents in Durham Region struggle with finding affordable and quality childcare. While the federal government's \$10-a-day program is helpful, parents still struggle with:

- **Long waitlists for licensed daycares:** Many daycares that offer affordable childcare have waitlists with over 300 children.
- **Daycare staff shortage:** There is a growing shortage of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in Durham and Ontario. By 2026, Ontario could face a shortage of 8,500 ECEs.
- **Rising operational costs:** Some childcare providers are considering leaving the \$10-a-day program because of the lack of funding for all the other expenses.
- **Limited access to affordable childcare:** While Ontario aims to create 86,000 new childcare spaces, less than 30% of them (approx. 25,500) will be affordable.

The Ontario government is responsible for regulating and overseeing childcare services. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Address the growing waitlist for daycare spaces in Durham?
- Ensure that the \$10-a-day childcare program remains sustainable and available for families?
- Ensure that new daycare spaces are created in high-demand areas like Oshawa, Ajax and Whitby?
- Address the shortage of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in Durham?

- Improve after-school care availability for working parents?

Seniors

Seniors in Durham have been facing an increasing number of challenges, including:

- **Financial insecurity:** At least 10% of seniors in Durham live in poverty, with immigrant seniors being particularly affected. Many seniors on fixed-incomes struggle with keeping their housing, due to increases in property taxes and other household expenses.
- **Accessibility:** Seniors face a growing lack of accessible transportation and affordable housing.
- **Long wait times for long-term-care spaces:** Almost 48,000 seniors are currently on a wait list to be admitted into long-term care in Ontario. This number is projected to exceed 50,000 by 2025.
- **Shortage of qualified care staff:** Shortage of qualified staff at both government and private seniors' homes is a big issue that can result in poor quality care and abuse.
- **Lack of quality care facilities:** Many private seniors' homes do not follow provincial regulations that could result in low quality care and poor living standards in these facilities.

The Ontario government is responsible for seniors' healthcare, long-term care, and social services. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Support seniors' financial security and their access to affordable and accessible transit and housing?
- Support community-based seniors' in-home services to reduce reliance on institutional care?
- Address staffing shortage in senior homes across Durham and improve working conditions for personal support workers (PSWs) and nurses in long-term care and private retirement homes?
- Decrease the long wait time to get into a long-term care facility?
- Improve care in private retirement and senior homes?

Immigration & Newcomers

Newcomers to Durham Region face several challenges, including:

- **Employment barriers:** International credentials and work experiences are often not recognized. This form of discrimination pushes newcomers to undergo additional certification processes, which are timely, expensive and slow down their access to employment.
- **Job search challenges:** Many newcomers have difficulties with conducting job search, often due to stereotyping and discrimination.

- **Affordable housing shortage:** Newcomer have difficulty securing affordable and suitable housing. Many are discriminated against because of the lack of credit history in Canada.
- **Language proficiency:** Limited English proficiency can limit access to settlement and employment services.
- **Access to services:** Newcomers may be unaware of available community resources.

Newcomer settlement is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Address the lack of affordable housing for newcomers and protect them from rental discrimination and exploitation by landlords?
- Increase provincial funding for immigrant support organizations in Durham Region?
- Address the lack of recognition of international credentials and reduce barriers to employment for skilled immigrants in Durham?
- Ensure that racialized newcomers are not disproportionately affected by employment discrimination and precarious work conditions?
- Support international students in Durham to access proper housing?

Public Education

Public and Catholic schools across Durham Region have been struggling with serious challenges that affect students, teacher and staff. These include:

- **Overcrowded schools and classrooms:** Some Durham students are learning in gyms, staff rooms and libraries because of lack of classrooms in overcrowded schools.
- **Teacher and staff shortage:** Shortage of staff has increased because of provincial funding cuts to school boards, burnout of current staff and the lack of recognition of international teaching credentials and experiences, even those from the Commonwealth countries.
- **Delays in building new schools:** While the Region and Ontario province have promised building new schools in Durham, this process has encountered numerous obstacles.
- **Safety concerns at schools:** Decades of no infrastructure maintenance resulted in increasing safety issues at Durham's public schools. In 2023, staff at a school in north Oshawa walked off the job because of safety concerns for both students and staff.
- **Lack of adequate resources and funding:** Schools are struggling with finding for technology, extracurricular programs, and special education services.

The Ontario government is responsible for funding, regulating, and overseeing the public and Catholic education systems from Kindergarten to Grade 12. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Address the issue of overcrowded classrooms in Durham and ensure the timely construction of new schools?
- Improve safety measures in schools to protect students and teachers?
- Provide sufficient funding for the maintenance and expansion of school facilities?
- Attract and retain qualified teachers?
- Ensure educational supports for students with diverse learning needs?

Affordability

Approximately 25% of households in Durham have difficulty accessing nutritious and proper food. Durham residents and particularly low-income families and individuals are dealing with:

- **Increasing food expenses:** Research show a rise in food prices, with a “basic healthy diet” for a family of four exceeding \$1,200 each month.
- **Housing affordability issues:** High housing costs have added to the cost-of-living crisis, leaving many residents not able to afford rent in the region.

The provincial government has significant control over many affordability related matters, such as housing and rent control, minimum wage rates, employment standards, taxes and fees, health and medicine costs, public transit funding, social assistance programs, etc. When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Reduce the current poverty levels and measure the success of any poverty reduction efforts?
- Ensure affordable, timely access to healthcare services for low-income individuals?
- Address poverty among seniors, people with disabilities and marginalized populations (for example, Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) communities)?
- End the crisis of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families?

And,

- What job training and employment programs will they offer for people experiencing poverty?

Poverty Reduction

Poverty is a growing issue for families and individuals in the Durham Region. The pressures associated with living in poverty can result in health issues and mental distress, anxiety and depression. Durham residents are facing:

- **Growing poverty:** The number of people experiencing poverty is increasing. More than 26% of the population are reported to be low-income.
- **Growing food insecurity:** One in four households cannot afford nutritious and healthy food. From 2021 to 2022, food banks saw a 58% increase in visits.

The Ontario government oversees key programs and policies that directly impact poverty reduction, including social assistance, housing, healthcare and employment. When comparing candidates, ask: How will the candidates and their parties:

- Advocate for living wage rates that ensure adequate incomes?
- Tackle increasingly food insecurity among families, individuals, and seniors?
- Actively work to dismantle systemic inequalities that contribute to poverty?

And

- Will they endorse implementing a basic income guarantee? Why or why not?
- Will they include health, mental health and addiction services into their poverty reduction strategies?

Public Transit

The demand for Durham Region Transit (DRT) services has returned to the level before the Covid-19 pandemic. However, transit users in Durham Region encounter several challenges, including:

- **High demand:** High demand on popular routes has overwhelmed transit capacity.
- **Longer wait times and overcrowded buses:** Lack of enough public transit especially in rapidly growing areas has resulted in long wait times and overcrowded buses.
- **Escalating traffic congestion:** Lack of public transit capacity and reliance on personal cars has increased traffic congestion and wait times for public transit.
- **Accessibility challenges in rural areas:** Public transit riders in rural areas face accessibility challenges due to the distance from their homes to the nearest public transit stop, as well as the distance from that stop to their destination.

The Ontario government plays a crucial role in funding, infrastructure and regional transit networks (like GO Transit). When comparing candidates, ask: How will they:

- Support DRT to solve overcrowding and long wait-times, and improve access to service for riders in northern Durham Region municipalities?
- Encourage residents to use public transit over personal cars?
- Improve public transit options for people with disabilities?
- Make DRT more accessible, reliable and sustainable?