

# Safety net frayed to crisis level: activists [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Years of underfunding and neglect by the Conservative government have left Ontario's social safety net in tatters, union and anti-poverty activists said Tuesday.

The result has been an explosive growth in poverty, food-bank use and homelessness that has been disastrous to people in dire need as well as to those who try to serve them, they said.

"We're dealing with a double-whammy situation," said Brian O'Keefe of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. "This crisis... is the direct result of the policies and twisted priorities of the Tory government."

To illustrate their point, the activists cited several areas in which front-line agencies have been caught by an overwhelming demand for their services at a time when they themselves are increasingly unable to cope. Figures from the Ontario Home Health Care Providers Association show six million fewer service hours - a 30 per cent cut - in just more than a year.

The activists said the government has also shown "total disdain" for regulated child care, leading to hundreds of spaces and making it difficult for many parents to work outside the home.

"If families don't have child care, they can't get out to work, it's as simple as that," said Jane Mercer of the Toronto Better Child Care Coalition.

"If they can't work, they haven't got a hope in hell of keeping their families above the poverty line." Mercer noted Ontario's politicians, including Premier Ernie Eves, will be getting a huge wage increase after the next election.

"That just makes me sick," she said.

Community Services Minister Brenda Elliott could not be immediately reached for comment.

Shelters across the province report occupancy rates of up to 140 per cent - meaning people are sleeping on mats in hallways - and communicable diseases such as tuberculosis are becoming endemic, he said. The government's answer has been to brand the homeless as "lazy, crazy and stupid," said Shapcott.

-Reprinted from Canadian Press

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[3]</sup>

poverty <sup>[4]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/07/safety-net-frayed-crisis-level-activists-ca> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [6]

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