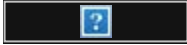


From: [Ontario News](#)
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NEWS RELEASE

Ontario Restoring Safety to Parks and Public Spaces

Province taking action to end encampments and crack down on public use of illegal drugs while investing \$75.5 million in homelessness prevention

December 12, 2024

[Premier's Office](#)

TORONTO — The Ontario government will introduce legislation today that will, if passed, better protect community safety by providing municipalities and police with new resources and enforcement tools to address the growing problem of homeless encampments and crack down on illegal drug use in parks and public spaces. Ontario is also investing \$75.5 million to further support homelessness prevention and provide people living in encampments with access to reasonable alternative accommodation. This is in addition to the province's ongoing \$700 million investment in homelessness prevention programs each year, as well as the \$378 million the province is investing in 19 Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hubs.

"Mayors and residents from communities across Ontario have been clear that enough is enough when it comes to encampments and illegal drug use in our parks and public spaces," said Premier Doug Ford. "Families deserve to enjoy their local parks and playgrounds without fearing for their kids. People facing homelessness or addiction and mental health challenges should be supported in the right settings. The federal government's

approach of legalizing dangerous drugs for use in our communities has failed and it needs to end.”

The province is dedicating \$75.5 million for programs that provide more long-term stable housing and temporary accommodations for those living in encampments, including:

- \$5.5 million to top up the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) to immediately free-up emergency shelter spaces for people living in encampments by helping people living in shelters move into longer-term housing, building on the nearly \$400 million Ontario and the federal government invested in COHB between 2023 and 2024.
- \$20 million to expand shelter capacity and create additional temporary accommodation spaces, like tiny modular units and climate-controlled semi-permanent structures, to provide people living in encampments with accessible alternative living options.
- \$50 million in funding designated for ready-to-build affordable housing projects across the province. This funding will be allocated based on how close a project is to completion, as well as its value for money, to help projects near completion but in need of targeted additional funding to open their doors faster.

This investment includes \$44.5 million in new provincial funding and \$31 million from the Canada-Ontario Community Housing Initiative.

Service managers who receive funding will be required to report back to the province on the number of individuals moved from encampments into new accommodations. They will also be required to submit spending plans to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for review and approval, to ensure the province's \$654 million yearly investment in the Homelessness Prevention Program is being used effectively and in line with the shared provincial and municipal goal of ending encampments by providing safe and stable housing for people at risk of homelessness.

To help clear parks and public spaces of encampments, the *Safer Municipalities Act, 2024* includes amendments to the *Trespass to Property Act*, which applies to private business, offices, stores, hotels, parks and vacant land. These amendments, if passed, will enhance penalties for

people who deliberately and continually break the law by adding the new aggravating factors of continuous trespassing and the likelihood to reoffend. In cases where these factors are present, these new tools will be applied by the court during sentencing.

The government is further protecting communities by introducing the *Restricting Public Consumption of Illegal Substances Act, 2024* that will, if passed, allow police officers and other provincial offences officers to direct individuals to stop using illegal substances or to leave the public space. This will allow them to issue a ticket or arrest someone who does not comply, providing an important additional tool to stop the consumption of illegal drugs in public spaces. People found guilty of violating this legislation, including those doing so in encampments, could face fines of up to \$10,000 or up to six months in prison.

As part of the province's focus on long-term treatment and recovery, the government is exploring new judicial approaches that provide the option of rehabilitation as an alternative to incarceration in the event of minor or non-violent drug crimes.

Quick Facts

- The [Trespass to Property Act](#) provides property owners and occupiers with tools to deal with trespassing on their property.
- As of October 2024, service managers report approximately 3,300 people in about 1,000 encampment locations across Ontario.

Quotes

"We have heard from the people of Ontario that they want their communities to be safe and clean. Encampments are a public safety concern and not a solution to homelessness. Mayors have asked us for help in managing this complex issue and we are ready to provide more funding for those municipalities that show results in winding down these sites so they can address the specific needs of people in encampments and quickly move them from crisis into safer accommodation and ultimately

stable, long-term housing."

- Paul Calandra

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

"Using illegal drugs in public is unacceptable. Everyone should feel safe when going to a park, riding transit, or walking through their neighbourhoods. Public safety is our top priority and that is why we are providing police with the tools they need to confidently keep our communities safe, knowing we stand with them every day."

- Michael Kerzner

Solicitor General

"Encampments are a serious issue in communities across the province. Our government's proposed changes to the Trespass to Property Act will provide additional tools to support restoring public order. These amendments are one facet of a balanced broader strategy to address this difficult issue and support both communities and those currently living in encampments."

- Doug Downey

Attorney General of Ontario

"Illicit drugs and particularly opioids such as fentanyl used in public spaces in encampments are a serious community safety threat. There is a clear risk to families and children that live around the growing number of encampments in Ontario. I am very pleased Premier Ford is taking bold action to address this."

- Patrick Brown

Mayor of Brampton

"Today's announcement represents an important step in addressing the interconnected challenges of health, homelessness and public safety. By investing in pathways to stable housing and expanding the supports available to those in need, we can ensure people receive the care they require while respecting the use of public spaces for everyone, which includes new tools to restrict the prevalence of open drug use."

- Josh Morgan

Mayor of London

"I am encouraged once again by the provincial investments and commitment to address the most complex health care issue our nation has faced. Today's announcement will provide vulnerable individuals who are living in encampments with safe, stable accommodations as well as ensure that our public spaces are safe for everyone to enjoy. All levels of government need to continue to work together as partners to find innovative solutions to address this national humanitarian crisis."

- Dan Carter

Mayor, City of Oshawa

"Premier Ford has found a sensible balance to deal with a complex issue. Adding resources to support more housing solutions while providing municipalities tools to enhance public safety will help make a positive difference in communities across Ontario."

- Drew Dilkens

Mayor of Windsor

"The actions in this legislation are what we asked for. It feels great to work with a government that listens. We are united to support our most vulnerable and create safer environments for everyone."

- Rob Burton

Mayor, Town of Oakville

"Premier Ford's announcement of additional funding for more shelter spaces, temporary housing and affordable housing units is welcome news. This approach prioritizes the dignity and well-being of individuals in need, while balancing other residents' right to feel safe in public spaces."

- Paul Lefebvre

Mayor of Greater Sudbury

"The legislation being brought forward today by Premier Ford is going to help municipalities maintain safety for residents while providing supports for those who are seeking help. We can't thank the Ford government enough for supporting municipalities in these very difficult times."

- Alex Nuttall

Mayor of Barrie

"This much needed funding to help transition those in encampments to safer shelter or housing is key and I applaud the Premier for this focus. Guelph is ready to partner with our Social Services Manager and with the government to ensure we have positive outcomes for those struggling with addictions, mental health and housing needs in our community. A top complaint I receive as mayor from citizens and businesses alike is about the open illegal drug use in our parks, downtown cores and other public spaces. This legislation looks to tackle these challenges head on and are most welcome."

- Cam Guthrie

Mayor, City of Guelph

"This issue affects the families, community and professionals who have been struggling for a long time without enough financial resources and legislative tools. The proposed legislation will curb the loss of lives and destruction of families, keep the peace and provide supports to those in need. Almost two decades ago, the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions made recommendations, that all parties could get on board with, to solve our ever-escalating mental health and addictions crisis. After successive governments, I am pleased that the Premier is introducing legislation that will make a difference in the lives of many."

- Jan Liggett

Mayor of Cambridge

"I am happy that Premier Ford and the provincial government have taken action that prioritizes the health and well-being of the residents of St. Catharines. The additional funding and focus will help provide the services the most vulnerable members of our community desperately need and the new legislation around open drug use protects the members of our community who know this illegal activity can't continue in public. The issues our cities face are complicated and all levels of government must work together to build more supportive housing units, expand shelter capacity and clean up encampments."

- Mat Siscoe

Mayor of St. Catharines

"The health and safety of our residents is critical and its no secret municipalities across the province are grappling with large unsafe encampments and increasing drug use in public spaces. All levels of government need to continue to come together to help those suffering with mental health and addictions challenges, while also ensuring our parks and public spaces are safe for everyone to enjoy. Today's announcement is an important step in addressing a very complex and challenging issue for municipalities."

- Bryan Paterson

Mayor of Kingston

"I am glad to see the Premier responded to our group's plea for help by providing enhanced funding for shelter and housing diversion programs and strengthening trespass and open drug use laws. This is a good first step in helping municipalities deal with the issues of homelessness and public disorder on our streets and in our parks."

- Kevin Davis

Mayor of Brantford

"Vulnerable people need help to navigate drug addiction, mental health and social supports. It's time for tough love and definitive action to help them achieve that and to restore dignity and safety to public spaces."

- Jim Diodati

Mayor of Niagara Falls

"We thank the Government of Ontario for its decisive actions and meaningful investments in addressing the complex and pressing issue of homelessness and encampments. This significant funding will provide much-needed support for those experiencing hardship - enabling us to create safer and more vibrant communities for the benefit of all residents, visitors and businesses. We are committed to working with the province to ensure these vital resources are used effectively to help people transition into stable housing and access the essential support services they need."

- Kevin Ashe
Mayor, City of Pickering

"Orillia Council's top priorities are looking at ways to help support our most vulnerable and ensuring public safety. We would like to thank the province for listening to us and taking action to provide further support to service providers as we all work together to address homelessness in our communities. The initiatives announced today by Premier Ford go a long way to support us as we partner together to navigate these difficult issues."

- Don McIsaac
Mayor of Orillia

"As a growing small urban municipality with hundreds of people experiencing homelessness, addiction and mental health issues, this new funding for shelters, supportive and transitional housing aligns with the housing first principles that will help us safely transition people out of encampments and connect them to the social and health services they need while also ensuring greater accountability. Today's announcement provides meaningful funding, actionable tools, compassion and a commitment to helping us keep our communities and public spaces safe for everyone."

- Bill Gordon
Mayor of Midland

"Emergency shelters are a critical part of the housing spectrum. Outreach and shelter are the first points of contact where we build trust and spark hope for individuals experiencing homelessness. Additional funding enhances The Salvation Army's capacity to connect with individuals and welcome them into a dignified spaces with comprehensive wrap around support services that meet their unique needs. Together, we can help more Ontarians start their journey towards home."

- Lt. Col. Brian Armstrong
Ontario Divisional Commander of The Salvation Army

"Drug paraphernalia and encampment health and fire issues are among the top community safety concerns for Ontario's small business owners. Many have told us about having to clean used needles and other garbage off their

property, often on a daily basis. This is unsafe and unsustainable for small business owners, their employees and their customers. Our members across Ontario overwhelmingly agree that all levels of government should work together to address these multi-faceted challenges."

- Julie Kwiecinski

Director of Provincial Affairs for Ontario, Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)

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