

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 more in homelessness prevention

NEWS

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TORONTO — The Ontario government will introduce legislation today that will, if passed, better protect community safety by providing municipalities and local 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 more 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. The federal government's approach of legalizing dangerous drugs for use in our communities has failed and it needs to end," 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. With today's announcement and in partnership with municipal leaders, that's exactly what we're doing."

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 that are near completion but in need of targeted additional funding open their doors faster.

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

"We have heard from the people of Ontario that they want their communities to be safe and clean," said Paul Calandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "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.”

To reclaim public space, the *Safer Municipalities Act, 2024* includes proposed amendments to the *Trespass to Property Act*, which applies to property in Ontario, including private business, offices, stores, hotels, parks and vacant land. The amendments, if passed, would direct the court to increase the penalty for individuals who refuse to leave a property, with maximum fines of up to \$10,000, after they have received a notice to do so or are found likely to reoffend.

“Encampments are a serious issue in communities across the province,” said Doug Downey, Attorney General of Ontario. “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.”

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 and continually breaks the law, 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.

“Using illegal drugs in public is unacceptable. Everyone should feel safe when going to a park, riding transit, or walking through their neighbourhoods,” said Solicitor General Michael Kerzner. “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.”

Under the proposed legislation, 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 XX yearly investment in the Homelessness Prevention Program is being used effectively and in line with the shared provincial and municipal goal of providing safe and stable housing for people at risk of homelessness.

QUICK FACTS

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

“As Mayor of Barrie, I look forward to working with Premier Ford to ensure that people in Barrie encampments get the help that they need, while ensuring that our communities and families feel safe.”

- Alex Nuttall, Mayor of Barrie

“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)

MEDIA CONTACTS

ontario.ca/newsroom
Disponible en français

Grace Lee

Premier’s Office

Grace.Lee5@ontario.ca

Jack Fazzari

Minister Downey’s Office

Jack.Fazzari@ontario.ca

Keesha Seaton

Communications Branch

mag-media@ontario.ca

Justine Teplycky

Minister Calandra’s Office

Justine.Teplycky@ontario.ca

MMAH Communications Branch

Mma.media@ontario.ca