

*****To sign on to this letter as a union local or as a community service agency or organization, please email: raisetheratescampaign@gmail.com***

October, 2012

Open Letter from Social Service and Front-line Community Workers on the Provincial Cut to the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)

In January 2013, as part of its austerity budget, the Ontario provincial government will cut 50% of funding to the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB). The other half of CSUMB money will go to municipal housing and homelessness programs that serve an even larger pool of low-income people, and CSUMB as we know it will effectively be eliminated. As social service and frontline community workers, we are opposed to this mean-spirited cost-cutting measure and the adverse impact that it will have on the health and well-being of the individuals and communities that we work with.

The CSUMB has been available to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients who are facing difficult crisis situations. This benefit has been used to: secure housing by people leaving shelters or hospitals; to pay rent arrears in order to avoid eviction; to pay utility arrears in order to avoid having your water or heat cut off during the freezing winter months; and purchasing basic household items such as a bed or mattress. Currently, some 16,000 people a month across Ontario rely on this vital benefit.

For frontline workers in the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector, the CSUMB has proved decisive in enabling women and their children to flee domestic violence situations and secure safe housing. Without access to this benefit, countless immigrants and refugees—many fleeing war, trauma and economically precarious conditions—would not be able to afford housing in Ontario upon arrival. For those individuals accessing drop-ins and shelters and struggling with extreme poverty, substandard housing and homelessness, mental and physical health disabilities, and addictions, the slashing of the CSUMB will certainly result in increased marginalization, homelessness, misery and hardship.

The provincial government's slashing of the CSUMB, along with other recent measures like the cut to the Special Diet Allowance, is contributing to increased poverty and inequality in our communities, especially for social assistance recipients.

For us as social service and front-line community workers, we see that these cuts to benefits are part of the same austerity agenda as attacks on public sector workers. The provincial government eliminates vital benefits to people on OW and ODSP, imposes contracts on public school teachers, and counts on us staying divided and unable to effectively fight back together.

We call on all social service and front-line community workers and agencies, and unions representing these workers, to speak out against this cut to CSUMB, and to 1) bring this to the membership and sign-on to this letter as a union local or agency; 2) advocate for access to CSUMB for clients and challenge unfair denials; 3) join with anti-poverty allies across the province in mobilizing against this cut.

We demand that this government immediately reverse the cut to CSUMB and additionally provide adequate rates of Social Assistance benefits so that people can live with health and dignity.

Signed,
