

Haliburton County-City of Kawartha Lakes Roundtable for Ending Poverty. “It’s not that COVID caused all of this. It’s just that it ripped the Band-Aid off a festering problem.”

The roundtable is part of a growing collection of voices behind Just Recovery Ontario that are calling for the provincial government to revisit policies enacted during the pandemic they believe are undermining public health.

“The pandemic starkly showed just how badly our support systems work for people who face marginalization due to poverty, oppression and inequality,” states Gillooly. “That marginalization resulted in bigger impacts from COVID-19 for many people, including people who are homeless, living on low incomes, women, newcomers, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, seniors, LGBTQ2SI+, people with disabilities, precarious and informal workers, migrant workers, sex workers, students, incarcerated and detained people and those who have or are experiencing violence.”

The Just Recovery campaign blames recent government policies for increasing risk and vulnerability, including refusing to implement paid sick leave, refusing to prevent the rising wave of evictions, and clawing back income supports from the lowest income Ontarians.

“Getting by in a pandemic is harder if you’re forced to live in poverty, but the Ontario government is actually clawing back the income supports the federal government is providing, and reducing its spending on social assistance by \$427 million,” states Belleville outreach worker Debbie Pike of Not Alone Team - Quinte, a not-for-profit group providing services to the homeless and at-risk population.

While government supports were made available, for some, it actually meant a step backwards.

Sherry Semple was receiving ODSP and was told she could apply for CERB during the pandemic. It meant extra money to cover expenses but also took away her benefits which she desperately needed to cover prescription and dental costs.

“All along, I thought it was OK to get this money,” said Semple. “The extra money is nice, but I can’t go without my medication.”

Fortunately, Semple requalified for ODSP and would no longer receive CERB.