

NEWS RELEASE

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Autism Ontario's Report on the 2018 Ontario Budget
March 28, 2018 (Toronto, ON)

For 45 years, Autism Ontario has envisioned *acceptance and opportunities for people on the autism spectrum*. The families who formed Autism Ontario in 1973 would never have imagined the prevalence rates for autism that continue to grow in Canada, even as this 2018 budget is released into the winds of the upcoming provincial election.

Regardless of which party finds themselves in a key leadership role after June 7, Autism Ontario continues to envision a province that offers seamless supports across the lifespan that reflect the wide range of expression in autism, the constantly changing needs of this able, yet vulnerable population and which addresses the needs of caregivers and families who bear both the joys and the substantial weight of care and advocacy for their children from infancy to and through adulthood.

Marg Spoelstra, Executive Director, Autism Ontario

In "A Plan for Care and Opportunity," Ontario's Finance Minister, Charles Sousa, announced plans that would contribute to the above hopes through items for specific autism supports and also through supports for people with developmental disabilities and mental health needs.

Important points of note for families with young children include an additional \$62 million directed towards the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) to expand current system capacity. At last report, 21,000 children and youth were waiting to receive autism services through this new program. Waiting lists are unacceptable for evidence-based services and we are hopeful these funds will help to alleviate the crush of families waiting to enter into autism treatment and programming.

In addition to autism programming, the Government of Ontario has recognized the importance of timely access to professional assessments for learners within the Ontario school boards. An investment of \$250 million over three years to address the current waitlists for special education assessments and improve access to special education programs and services in schools is welcome news for families who continue to advocate for their child's needs in the classroom.

Outside of the classroom, school boards will have the capacity to build multidisciplinary teams by hiring additional professional support staff including psychologists, speech and language pathologists, social workers and behaviour specialists. We know that school issues remain one of the top concerns expressed by parents of students on the autism spectrum. One of the most significant issues about ABA programming in Ontario is the challenge of access to excellence in ABA-based supports in Ontario's publicly funded schools. The gap that remains between coordinating ABA services between schools and the community must be resolved if parents are to have confidence that their children will be able to achieve their full potential.

\$2.1 billion dollars over the next four years has been directed towards mental health supports to increase the level of care and access for mental health and addictions services, including publicly funded psychotherapy, supportive housing and increased supports. Mental health issues are often seen alongside ASD, including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and psychosis. Historically, mental health services have not demonstrated capacity to serve people on the autism spectrum. It is our hope that although not named specifically, they will have equal access to the proposed system-wide supports. We are also pleased to see that First Nations, Inuit and Metis children and youth are specifically named to receive community-designed/based mental health services.

\$1.8 billion directed towards increasing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates by three per cent annually for the next three years, starting in fall 2018 is welcomed news for those individuals eligible to receive ODSP, however, over half of individuals with ASD are ineligible for that support because they do not meet Developmental Services Ontario criteria. Our question of “if not this door, then which door?” remains. Ontarians with ASD continue to struggle with a systemic lack of accessibility, inequity and massive unmet needs in the current service systems in Ontario.

We know that the rates of autism are increasing in Canada and so is the urgency to meet the needs of children, youth and adults on the autism spectrum, and their families. Ontario must be prepared to support all individuals with ASD within the context of development, learning, family and community throughout our province. This announcement is another step in the right direction, and as funding for services and supports continue to evolve and grow, Autism Ontario will continue to support access to seamless, individualized, continually-assessed, evidence-based and effective interventions and supports across the lifespan of all people with ASD.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a 45 year history of representing thousands of families and people with ASD across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has formal parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate on behalf of all people with ASD and their families. To connect with us, visit autismontario.com

Vision: Acceptance and Opportunities for all people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Mission: To ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

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