



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto, Ontario, February 6, 2019

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services announces plan to clear Ontario Autism Program waitlists

Autism Ontario is committed to supporting families through this province-wide program change and will work with the Autistic community to find solutions to this process.

Today's announcement from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services represents another change to children's programming across our province and the program direction will mean different things to different families.

Much of today's announcement echoes what Autism Ontario hears from families across the province. Long waitlists are one of the [largest barriers to accessing diagnostic and required services](#). Right now, Ontario families wait over a year for a diagnosis and the proposed increase in funding to expand the province's five diagnostic hubs would help to eliminate this barrier.

Once diagnosed, under the current program, families continue to experience barriers to accessing behavioural services. There is no one-size-fits all solution to this problem as some of these barriers are waitlist related, some are financial and some are related to our provincial capacity to provide access to high-quality ABA professionals. These challenges also continue to be shaped by geographic, language or cultural barriers, and a provincial system that continues to operate in a siloed fashion.

The efficacy and success of our autism programming must not fall solely on the shoulders of children's programming. To support people on the spectrum, we need a commitment across all ministries, including adult services, education, health, mental health, post-secondary, and employment sectors. Without this, families will continue to struggle for support and our society will continue to fail Autistic people and their families across their lifespan.

We surveyed Ontario families and Autistic adults in 2018, notably, 66.4% of Ontario families told us they wanted a Direct Funding model in Ontario. Families wanted the ability to choose their own service provider and control the timing and the location of their treatment. This new program addresses that expressed desire.

With that in mind, the proposed funding options, up until the age of 18 will suit the needs of some families, but not all. This does not address the varied support needs. Some families pay anywhere from \$60,000 to \$80,000 dollars a year for evidence-based intervention. For Northern, Indigenous, rural or Francophone families, there are currently few professionals, and little to no

programs or supports on which to spend this funding. The challenge remains that families who experience geographical, cultural, or linguistic barriers are still unable to access equitable service in contrast to areas that are more resourced.

Establishing a list of qualified providers is welcomed news. Helping families access qualified clinical supervisors for behavioural services has been a long-standing issue in the autism community, with behavior professionals, parents and organizations advocating for the regulation of behavior services in Ontario.

We will work with families and this government through the challenges and opportunities that will be present with this new approach. This expanded role will allow us to pay close attention to a family's ability to use these funds or to help families to create new responses that make sense for them locally.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a 46 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 – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.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.

New to Autism? Find help for navigating the system after a diagnosis, school issues, and other ASD information; please contact your local **Family Support Coordinator** [here](#).

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Toronto, Ontario, February 12, 2019

Statement from Autism Ontario

On February 07, 2019 the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services made an announcement about the changes being made to the Ontario Autism Program. Given our communications with various stakeholders and in reviewing various comments on social media since the announcement, it became clear that there were a number of misunderstandings or assumptions about Autism Ontario's views or actions that we wish to address.

- Autism Ontario neither proposed nor endorsed the announced changes to the OAP and is concerned about the impact these changes will have on children and families accessing the program.

Autism Ontario spoke with multiple media outlets in response to the announcement and also released our own [statement](#) on February 08, 2019. Autism Ontario's input to the Ontario Government regarding the OAP since Fall 2018:

- As a host of [ABACUS](#) website, we report quarterly to MCCSS about the numbers of self-listed ABA providers and trends regarding communications with providers and caregivers accessing the site.
- We have shared the results of our 2017 and 2018 Annual Province-wide Survey with MCCSS. Key highlights of the 2017 survey have been available on our website in [an infographic](#) and shared widely through social media and in our magazine Autism Matters.
- On January 15, 2019 we presented an oral and [written submission](#) to the Minister of Finance at its pre-budget consultations regarding a range of issues facing autistic children and adults and their families and highlighted 10 top areas of concern identified by caregivers and autistic adults who responded to our 2018 province-wide survey. This presentation also included our views regarding rumoured changes to the OAP.

In keeping with its support to families through its 25 Chapters for 46 years and through MCCSS funded Family Support Coordinators for the past 12 years, Autism Ontario has agreed to:

- Expand our supports to assist families in navigating the changes to the OAP beginning April 2019 as they use their funding in local communities across Ontario.

We will not be managing intake into the OAP or making decisions about eligibility or funding levels for individual families, or managing OAP financing.

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