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**Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs**

**Agences ontariennes de soutien pour les personnes qui ont des besoins speciaux**

**ONTARIO AGENCIES SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

**2014 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF FINANCE**

**FEBRUARY 2014**

Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a volunteer-run association whose 172 member agencies serve over 65,000 of Ontario’s most vulnerable citizens and employ 25,000 full and part time staff. OASIS member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Currently, between 12,000 and 20,000 adults with developmental disabilities live with their families and are languishing on waiting lists, in dire need of support.

Existing services alone will face a funding short-fall of $100 million by 2015/2016.This figure does not take into account the pressures related to legislated pay equity in the sector. Nor does it account for the thousands of individuals currently on waiting lists for services across the province.

**HOW TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR ONTARIO’S MOST VULNERABLE**

1. *WHERE GOVERNMENT CAN MAKE AN IMMEDIATE DIFFERENCE*

Many of our member agencies have legislated pay equity commitments to their staff. In a frozen funding environment, services will be negatively impacted in order to meet these legal requirements. Some organizations have made the decision to not meet pay equity commitments as funding has been frozen. Others have reduced staffing levels and services in order to meet this legal obligation. There are simply no means left to cut services without endangering the people they serve and support. The sector does not actually have a Pay Equity issue. All agencies that had internal comparators met their PE obligation years ago. Agencies that were mandated to compare with salaries in the health (and other?) sector have years remaining before their obligation is met. The comparison is the issue but the legal obligation remains:

* At no cost to the government, the province must delay this pressure. Make changes to the Proxy Pay Equity legislation, or amend Proxy Regulation 396/93, to allow for in-sector comparators, placing a moratorium on Proxy Pay Equity liabilities until changes are put in place, and commit to funding pay equity adjustments to completion once the changes are in place. This will work to prevent the loss of 3,600 full-time positions and dramatic reduction of services for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Many of our member agencies deliver transfer payments on an ad hoc annual basis. An inability to plan for more than one year ahead means that agencies lack the ability to apply localized expertise to ensure cost-effective service delivery with long term stability and planning. Often new fiscal funding is provided to our members in the fourth quarter of the budget year with all spending required to be completed by year end, with all applicable broader public sector accountability act requirements appropriately in place. There frequently is not the time available to ensure the funds are spend in the most effective and most responsible way possible. To provide greater flexibility in planning and the use of resources and to ensure that local agencies can stretch the value of each dollar of funding they receive, at no additional cost to the government:

* The budget process must allow for the creation of reserves. Transfer payment agencies should have four year rolling budgets of their own, with accountability measures, for the purposes of establishing reserves to fund capital items and major repairs, and to develop innovative, cost-effective programs in a planned manner.

1. *PRIORITY NEEDS*

Additional investments are needed to ensure that critical and immediate needs are balanced with the imperative for preventative and proactive services. The province must commit to a one-time investment to stop the mounting crisis situation created by four consecutive years of no additional funding to sustain existing services or even annual cost of living increases. Funding based on crisis alone will ensure that waiting lists continue to grow, that we all fall further behind, and the burden to taxpayers continues to skyrocket.

That the Minister of Finance, at a minimum, makes an investment of an additional 2% on current base budgets in Transfer Payment agencies for 2014-15 to enable agencies to continue providing

1. *LONG TERM NEEDS*

The Government of Ontario must consider how the developmental services sector can be included within an integrated strategy to address poverty and the need for accessible and affordable housing. A study published in Canadian Public Policy (35, 2009) entitled, *Economic* *costs of caring for children with disabilities in Canada,* found the majority of families with disabled children incur significant economic costs, explicitly in out-of-pocket expenses and the forgone employment opportunities of caregivers. Non-medical costs, such as added transportation to and from appointments or therapy, were also found. Labour-market problems, such as lost opportunities for parents, were associated with the severity of the child’s condition. These costs are actually magnified for parents of adults once they can no longer access the public school system.

A commitment to invest in the developmental services sector would ensure that by April 1st, 2020, every person who has a developmental disability - and their family - has access to the support they need to live in the community, free from poverty. To this end, OASIS supports the service improvement recommendations outlined in the 2012 report commissioned by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Brighter Prospects*, which reviewed social assistance in Ontario.[[1]](#endnote-1)

* That the government implements the changes recommended in *Brighter Prospects* in a timely manner.

1. Establish a standard rate for adults living alone or a modified standard rate for people in shared accommodations. The standard rate would be a flat amount, with future rate increases varied regionally to reflect differences in living costs across Ontario.

   Develop a new “Basic Measure of Adequacy” to serve as the benchmark for determining the adequacy of social assistance rates, based on the costs of food, clothing, and footwear, a basic list of personal and household needs, transportation, and shelter in different Ontario regions.

   Through the upcoming review of minimum wage, link changes in the minimum wage to Ontario’s economic performance, labour market outcomes, and earnings distribution, so that the minimum wage can be used as an appropriate “reference wage”. Minimum wage increased yesterday

   Undertake research into the impact of benefit withdrawal rates on work incentive.

   Until the system is fully transformed, there would be two additional building blocks on top of the standard rate provided through social assistance: a disability supplement for recipients with disabilities, and uniform supplements for families with children and sole-support parents.

   A disability benefit outside social assistance should be introduced as a priority, to help combat the high level of unemployment among people with disabilities, and to improve the financial incentive to work. This benefit would recognize that there can be additional costs of living with a disability, and employment opportunities and earnings may be constrained for people with disabilities;

   That no new benefits be introduced within the social assistance system without also making them available to all low-income Ontarians. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)