



About OASIS

Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a volunteer-run, member-driven provincial organization. Its member agencies serve over 65,000 of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens and employ 25,000 full and part-time staff. Its 195 member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

OASIS has, and will continue to work successfully with government to help identify the challenges being faced by transfer payment agencies, families and individuals with special needs, while also working with our member agencies to build capacity through transformative changes that will help us respond to the ever-growing need for more services and supports.

Current Challenges and Opportunities

The Developmental Services Sector is at an important, indeed critical, juncture as identified in the 2016 Ontario Ombudsman's Report: Nowhere to Turn, and the recent 2017 Operating Pressures Survey undertaken by OASIS. It is recognized that the model of institutional care for individuals with developmental disabilities was a failure and ceased operation in the Province of Ontario. As a province we have moved to embrace a community based approach promoting social inclusion, individual choice and independence.

Community agencies are the backbone of the Developmental Service Sector. They are the strategic leaders and experts who champion inclusive, vibrant, strong and diverse communities. Their provision of dedicated, trained professionals ensures that capacity can be realized, high quality services sustained, and communities thrive. Continued failure to invest in a manner that helps community agencies meet demands, will mean a loss of vital support to communities and the ability to provide timely and necessary services that help everyone succeed both now, and in the future.

Growing waiting lists and increases in the number of families in crisis – primarily composed of young people with a developmental disability leaving school, more complex care and behavioural needs, and older individuals living with aging parents – are urgent and high risk challenges in Ontario. It is essential that steps be taken that enable supports and services to reach a broader range of people, encourage and allow new initiatives to be launched and ensure the long term financial and support stability of the sector.

Unfortunately, there have been unintended consequences during the transformation of the sector. Long-term failure to provide base funding budget increases to assist community agencies to keep up with cost of living pressures and to carry out legislated changes has stalled progress towards what could have been realized, and has compromised system capacity and the long-term sustainability of a sector clearly identified as already being in crisis.

As stated by the Ombudsman in his report *Nowhere to Turn*: “It is often said that societies are judged on how they treat the most vulnerable of their members. The time has come to move beyond apologies and work towards a consistent, co-ordinated, collaborative, and responsive developmental services system, able to effectively and humanely meet the needs of individuals and families in crisis.”

We appreciate that government has committed to provide funding to help agencies implement the costs related to Bill 148 but these funds while appreciated are only responsive to the new changes mandated by government and do not begin to address the long term erosion and instability created by multiple years of no base funding to the developmental sector.

Community Agencies Matter

OASIS member agencies are governed by many pieces of legislation including Pay Equity. Most agencies that were required to use the Proxy Comparison method for Pay Equity have not achieved Pay Equity and are still many years away from achieving their target rates. Originally provincial funding was provided from 1993 to 2009, however, in the past nine years the province has ceased funding for this legislated obligation. Each year, agencies are required to commit an amount equal to a minimum of 1% of the previous year’s payroll for Pay Equity wage rate increases. The disparity between pay rates in agencies with or without pay equity obligations continues to escalate, a greater reliance on part-time contract employees grows, and staffing cuts and services impacts are being felt as identified in OASIS’s Operating Cost Pressures Survey.

In November 2017, OASIS released its *4th Operating Cost Pressures Survey* that continues to monitor and assess the impact that 9 years of zero budget increases, the lack of funding for pay equity obligations and cost of living increases has had on agencies. The cumulative results since the first survey carried out in 2012 show:

- 40,000 staffing hours/week cut
- 375 FTE’s cut
- 4,385 program hours/week cut
- 29 programs permanently shut down

Compared to the last survey conducted in 2014, the overall message from survey respondents can be summarized as:

- Low staff morale
- Services to individuals are being cut or reduced
- Agencies are not able to maintain the desired quality of service
- More time and effort is required to comply with administrative regulations (time and effort taken away from client care)

To combat cost pressures, community agencies continue to diligently take steps to try and manage their increasing operating costs. Reducing staff hours and/or positions as a step has increased almost 10% since 2014. Permanently closing a program, or shutting one down for a specific period of time (e.g. summer, Christmas) has remained fairly consistent over the last few surveys, as has changing the delivery method for a program. Agencies are at their breaking point and the sector is in crisis.

OASIS will continue to support our member agencies to build capacity through transformative changes that will help us respond to the ever-growing need, while also working with government to help identify the challenges being faced by community agencies, families and individuals with special needs.

While we appreciate the previously announced investment of \$810 million to the sector, the actual annualized amount to service was in fact \$372 million. In addition, the \$200 million identified of this investment as funds to support front-line workers was in fact only \$72 million annualized to the developmental services sector. The Ministry of Community and Social Services directed that these funds could NOT be utilized for Pay Equity obligations in unionized agencies unless agreement was reached with a union local. Unfortunately, the majority of agencies were not able to get agreement to utilize these resources for Pay Equity as unions see Pay Equity as a legislated entitlement.

If we adopt the recommendations 6, 7 and 8 outlined in the Gender Wage Gap Steering Committee Final Report related to Pay Equity this would require:

- A competitive, appropriate compensation range be set for developmental services that, in combination with needs identification, is the basis for all funding decisions
- New Pay Equity plans using a single common comparator be completed for all agencies in the developmental services sector that ensures wages are equitable from a gender perspective.
- Government must commit and build a framework to fund the outstanding pay equity identified through this process.

People Matter

Community agencies make the promise of citizenship real for those with a developmental disability. Our members firmly believe that we are not full citizens if our neighbours are not; and citizenship means nothing if those with developmental disabilities and their families cannot live rich and fulfilling lives. Funding and supports that are only realized when an individual and their family go into crisis is a travesty and does not reflect a society and government that is responsive to every Ontarian in a fair and equitable way.

Every day OASIS members support people to overcome barriers to full inclusion and citizenship within their communities. Our members are advocates for high quality, and cost effective supports and services. They work to ensure that people living with a developmental disability are active and present in all aspects of community.

The focus on funding crisis situations and adults still in receipt of children's funding, as well, as Crown wards aging out of service has placed significant economic pressure on the sector. This philosophy has led to increased family crisis – more complex needs – and increased cost to the Province of Ontario. The Government of Ontario must work with the Sector to develop sustainable strategies to ensure that all individuals needing supports are able to access the system in a timely way. Recent statistics show that 48% of people on the waitlist have low to moderate support needs and may never receive services if we continue using a reactive model of crisis management rather than a proactive method of service delivery.

As of March 31, 2016, approximately 14,900 individuals were waiting for Ministry-funded residential supports across Ontario. The current funding and service models are not sustainable to address future needs. To ensure the sustainability of quality supports and services, and achieve the vision of transformation for the sector, a long-term plan must be developed to increase the opportunities for inclusion and participation of people with a developmental disability in our communities across Ontario.

OASIS and the OASIS Business Resource Committee have been working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Provincial Network on recommendations for a funding model for individualized or direct funding since 2007/08. While the Ministry of Community and Social Services has provided 25,000 individuals with Passport Services, a long term sustainable funding mechanism is needed to meet the overwhelming needs of individuals on the waitlist for services and to provide choice and stability in the sector. Direct funding allocations must be utilized in a manner that adheres to the regulatory requirements of the Ministry of Community and Social Services under the Services and Supports to Promote the Social Inclusion of Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act.

Where individuals have support dollars allocated to them to meet their needs, individuals and their families must have the right to choose between managing their own funds or having an agency assist them with their support needs. The Government of Ontario must develop a mechanism to monitor and adjust the funding levels as needed. An annual review of the established funding levels needs to occur and be monitored. Statistical information such as the annual cost of living allowance (COLA) and any wage adjustments provided or legislated by the Government of Ontario should be used to assist in determining if funding levels are up to date.

Collaboration Matters

Community agencies develop and maintain expert networks that assist people with a developmental disability and their families to navigate the complexities of a fragmented system, and to access resources in their community. Government's commitment to engage communities in inter-Ministerial discussions is vital to achieve fully informed initiatives that are responsive to the diversity and needs of the disability community. Partnerships and collaboration with community agencies prevents duplication of services and ensures communities are inclusive for all Ontarians. The Government of Ontario must consider how the developmental services sector can be included within an integrated strategy to develop resources that address poverty and accessible and affordable housing, to help address the waiting list of more than 20,000 vulnerable adults and aging families waiting for services.

The Developmental Services Sector must not duplicate generic services available in the community, but must have access to these services. The sector should be able to concentrate its energies on the supports to individuals with a developmental disability and not have to also provide the bricks and mortar required. How many of the 14,900 individuals waiting for Ministry-funded residential supports across Ontario could have support provided if the bricks and mortar could be available through other initiatives that are already being funded by municipalities, provincial and federal governments for all Ontarians?

OUR ASK:

- The Government immediately invest \$300 million on an annualized basis to stabilize the foundation of existing services. This funding will enable agencies to cover the inflationary pressures that have built up over the past nine years of no base funding and to address the impacts of the unfunded liability of the Pay Equity Act. We encourage the Government of Ontario to immediately enact recommendations 6, 7 and 8 of the Gender Wage Gap Steering Committee Final Report. Once these changes are in place, the government must

also commit to funding Pay Equity adjustment to completion. This will prevent the loss of 3,600 full-time positions and mitigate risk of impact to services for people with developmental disabilities and their families

- Annualized funding on a long-term basis to address the ever increasing wait list is a reasonable and obvious solution.
- Individuals and families want a choice between managing their own funds or having an agency assist them where individuals have support dollars allocated to them to meet their needs.
- A mechanism to monitor and adjust funding levels annually is urgently required. Statistical information such as the annual cost of living allowance (COLA) and any wage adjustments provided or legislated by the Government of Ontario should be used to assist in determining if funding levels are up to date.
- The negative impacts that Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2107, has created on the Broader Public Service Sector offers a significant opportunity for the Government of Ontario to take constructive funding action.

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