

December 13, 2005

OASIS Presentation to Minister of Finance: Ontario Budget 2006

OASIS – “*Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs*” – welcomes the consultation process for the 2006 Ontario Budget and is pleased to have the opportunity to submit the following comments and recommendations.

OASIS:

- Continues to strongly support the Minister of Community and Social Services’ intention to bring forward a new longer term vision for the Developmental Services Sector;
- Shares the Minister’s goal of ensuring that the - “*Transformation of Services in Ontario for People who have a Developmental Disability*” - is a success, and results in a collective commitment to achieving and maintaining a high quality, flexible and cost-effective service system that meets the lifelong needs of Ontario individuals with developmental disabilities;
- Urges the Minister and the Government - to ensure both the effective implementation of a new vision for the Sector and a smooth transition for those individuals with developmental disabilities affected by the closure of the remaining regional institutions - to provide increased funding for the sector for 2006-07 and to commit to sustained year-over-year funding increases for future years in the Government’s fiscal framework; and
- Respectfully requests that the Minister and the Government adopt the specific recommendations of OASIS (as found on page 4) in the 2006 Budget.

Background

OASIS is a province-wide association that seeks to ensure cost-effective, high quality supports and services for persons with developmental disabilities, and to strengthen the operations of its members.

Founded by 6 non-profit agencies in 1996, OASIS' membership has grown to more than 110 non-profit transfer payment agencies located in all regions and communities of Ontario. Such agencies, funded in whole or in part through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, constitute the primary vehicle for delivering accountable supports and services to individuals with developmental disabilities.

OASIS member agencies deliver government-regulated services for persons with developmental disabilities, primarily in the form of:

- Residential care via group homes, or approved family-home programs
- Supported Independent Living programs
- Day programs - both Lifeskills and Workshops
- Supported Employment programs leading to independent employment

Estimates indicate that about 3 percent of the population of Ontario have a developmental disability. Such persons require a wide range of tailored supports geared to their individual needs to ensure that they can participate in community life to the fullest extent possible. Such needs include but are not limited to:

- Total or sophisticated medical care
- Psychiatric care and/or behavioural support
- Support for physical disabilities
- Geriatric care

Considerations

The quality and strength of a society is reflected in the treatment it accords those who, though no choice or fault of their own, constitute its most vulnerable citizens. In OASIS' view, Ontario can and must do better.

It is generally accepted - and acknowledged by all political parties in Ontario - that the developmental services sector has been and continues to be underfunded. OASIS member agencies, while striving to maintain service standards, readily attest to the reality that funding has not kept pace with needs or cost pressures over the past 15 years.

While funding for non-profit transfer-payment agencies has remained constrained under successive Governments, the service delivery agencies have had to struggle with increases in all of their costs whether in the form of higher utility prices (notably gas and electricity), increased labour and insurance costs, or higher WSIB premiums. In no area have costs remained static or fallen.

Between 1992 and 2005 – the Consumer Price Index rose by 25.60% - an average of just under 2% per year. Over the same 13-year period, the “base” funding for developmental service agencies remained frozen at the 1992 level, except for a small (0.5%) increase in base budget funding for 2004/05 and 2005/06. OASIS acknowledges that some incremental funding has also been made available in recent years; however, such funds have been targeted to specific purposes such as pay equity obligations.

OASIS urges recognition that this situation cannot be sustained and that continued underfunding comes at a significant cost to both the individuals concerned and society at large. Transfer payment agencies either have reached, or are reaching, their limits in terms of the type and quality of supports and services they can offer. Salaries remain low and uncompetitive, staff turnover remains high, staff-to-client ratios are approaching the “minimum level of care” level, and further cost increases can no longer be absorbed without compromising minimum service standards.

Specific Recommendations

1. Increased Funding for Base Budgets

That the Budget provide funding to increase the base budgets of transfer payment agencies by a minimum of 3% effective April 1, 2006, together with an undertaking to develop and introduce a formula to ensure adequate ongoing base budget and program cost funding. This will permit the sector to respect service standards, improve service and care, and increase, on a progressive basis, the salaries of full-time front line counsellors to levels comparable with the salaries for groups engaged in similar occupations within the Broader Public Sector.

OASIS also recommends that an indexation formula be developed and adopted for all cost pressures that are beyond the control of the transfer payment agencies. Examples include WSIB premium increases, fuel, utility, food and supply costs, increased costs arising from existing and new legislative and regulatory requirements (including but not limited to Pay Equity obligations), and negotiated salary and benefit increases.

2. ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Plan)

That, with respect to income support provided through ODSP, the Budget increase the benefits provided to a minimum level at or above the announced 'poverty line' within the Province; that benefits be subject to automatic indexation; and, that benefits be maintained throughout a disabled individual's efforts to obtain employment.

3. Revised Funding Model

That, in recognition of their important contribution to the developmental services sector, the government adopt a multi-year funding model to provide greater stability and predictability for transfer payment agencies and consequently to permit improved longer term planning. Further, subject to agreed accountability and outcome measures, there should be a single or omnibus "agency-based" funding agreement - to replace the current "silo" dedicated revenue streams. This would provide financial flexibility for transfer payment agencies to meet changing, unforeseen or emergency requirements. Finally, transfer payment agencies should be permitted to carry forward funding from one year to the next and to establish funding reserves, including reserves to meet predictable expenses that are currently not allowable under ministry regulations.

OASIS appreciates the opportunity to present these recommendations and would be pleased to provide any additional information as may be required.