



January 31, 2006

## **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 appreciates 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, accessible, equitable and sustainable service system that meets the lifelong needs of Ontario individuals with developmental disabilities;
- Urges 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 substantially 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 Government adopt the specific recommendations of OASIS (page 5) 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 of a society is reflected in the treatment it accords those who, through no choice or fault of their own, constitute its most vulnerable citizens. Ontario can and must do better for individuals with developmental disabilities.

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 members, while striving to maintain service standards, 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, 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 insurance costs, or higher WSIB premiums. In no area have operating costs remained static or fallen.

Between 1992 and 2006 – the CPI rose by about 28% - an average of some 2% per year. Over the same 14-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 been provided in recent years; however, such funds have been targeted mainly to specific purposes such as pay equity obligations.

Continued underfunding comes at a significant cost to both the individuals concerned and society at large and this situation cannot be sustained. 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 generally uncompetitive, staff turnover remains high, and staff-to-client ratios are approaching the “minimum level of care” level. In the absence of additional funding, further cost increases can no longer be absorbed without compromising minimum service standards.

In addition to the difficulties underfunding poses for the sustainability and quality of services provided by transfer payment agencies, and the attendant risks for the individuals they serve, it needs to be recognized that progress is not being made in reducing the waiting lists for service and that the waiting lists are exerting considerable pressure on the system.

The needs of a growing numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities who are living at home with ageing parents, leaving school with no supports available, or having particularly challenging requirements, cannot be met by the resources currently available.

OASIS acknowledges that some additional funding has been provided for group homes, day programs (“Passports”) and specialized resources in recent years. It remains however that such funding has not kept pace with needs and waiting lists for services are not only not falling but growing.

As well, the issue of overcoming cross-ministerial responsibilities and boundaries must be addressed. There are a considerable number of people with developmental disabilities whose needs cannot be met solely through funding provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

For example, there are those who get into trouble and become involved with the justice system, the Ministry of Corrections and the Ministry of the Attorney General. This problem is growing especially among young adults. There are also

those who have a dual diagnosis, i.e., those who have mental health issues as well as a developmental disability. Such individuals need the supports and services of the Ministry of Health which, in many areas of the province, are lacking for our population. There is also the longstanding and worsening situation of the growing number of aging individuals with developmental disabilities who need services that respond appropriately to their unique needs. Addressing the needs of persons with developmental disabilities also involves the mandates of the Ministers of Education, Transportation and Housing.

Recently, OASIS member agencies completed MCSS surveys on the availability of professional supports (Psychiatrists, Psychologists, etc.). OASIS knows that there are significant shortages of appropriate health services available for those with a dual diagnosis, but the survey results have not been shared with our member agencies.

There is no question that failure to respond appropriately to these needs will lead to increasing community difficulties and increased pressure on other elements of the system including the justice system. Enhanced and sustained funding to address these issues is not only necessary from a humanitarian standpoint but, combined with a “holistic” cross-Ministerial approach that OASIS considers a critical component of a “transformed” system, will yield savings in the future.

### 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 more competitive 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 for Transfer Payment Agencies

That, pending the implementation of a "transformed" developmental services sector in the years to come, and as part of such a transformed sector, the Government adopt a multi-year funding model to provide greater stability and predictability for the operations of transfer payment agencies. 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.**