



Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs

**OASIS Member Toolkit:
MPP Engagement**

2023



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OASIS 2023 Member Toolkit – MPP Engagement

Objective

The Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is encouraging its members to build relationships and meeting in-person and virtually with their local MPPs from all major parties. Member agencies play an important role in engaging directly with MPPs to highlight our sector's priorities from a local perspective.

The focus of these meetings is to advocate on the need to commit to and support a sustainable future for Ontario's DS sector through properly funded reform, as guided by the government's long-term vision set out in *Journey to Belonging*. Successful and sustainable reform rests on the three essential pillars of OASIS' current sector priorities: **staffing, housing and better collaboration with health care**.

Staffing:

- A fully funded multi-year sector staffing strategy to help attract and retain creative, compassionate and highly capable frontline staff;

Housing:

- Committing 10% of the next phase (expected to commence sometime in 2023) of National Housing Strategy funding to a prioritized investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities; and

Better Collaboration with Health Care:

- Bridge the developmental services gap between community services, education, and health care by bringing together officials from these key Ministries to increase the life expectancy, quality of life and autonomy of people living with developmental disabilities.

Member agencies will be able to provide a non-partisan local perspective to MPPs on the importance of these priorities, secure commitments of support, and help OASIS establish a network of new and re-invigorated relationships with elected representatives serving in the Ontario Legislature.

MPP ENGAGEMENT: Building Relationships and Telling Your Story

Your voice is vital. OASIS members provide the compelling, community-focused context that will resonate with MPPs from across the province. We want OASIS members in every community to connect with their local MPPs of all major parties – whether PC, NDP Liberal, Green or independent.

This will be part of an ongoing, local dialogue with your local MPPs that will significantly contribute to OASIS' efforts and build momentum on the sector's priorities, as well as to lay a foundation or continue to build your relationship with those MPPs to engage on other important issues going forward.

Meeting Your MPP(s)

Step 1: Scheduling and Preparing for a meeting.

- Enclosed in this toolkit is a template meeting invitation that you can use for your own local outreach.
 - As required, OASIS staff will be able to provide you with the contact information you need for your local MPPs, as well as answer any questions you may have.
- **Be as accommodating as possible** in terms of making yourself available to meet with the MPP, for whatever length of time they have available.
- MPPs get a lot of meeting requests. You should expect to **follow-up on your invitation** after a few days if you haven't received any acknowledgement or a confirmed a date for the meeting.
- There is **strength in numbers** when arranging MPPs meetings. We encourage you, where appropriate, to seek to **schedule meetings in partnership with other local agencies**. In addition to having the support of another agency, it may increase the chances of successfully securing the meeting and demonstrate to MPPs in real-time that the sector is speaking with one voice.
- Once the virtual meeting is scheduled, remember to **share the enclosed briefing materials and the names/titles of those participating in the meeting with the MPP's office**. This will help them prepare in advance and contribute to a better dialogue.
- Review the resources provided in this toolkit in advance of your meeting.
- If more than one person is joining the call from your team, determine speaking roles in advance.
- It is important to prepare local examples as stories strengthen your message.

Step 2: Conducting a meeting.

- Focus on the key messages and “ask” and highlight the local examples in combination with the key messages from the briefing materials.
- Be passionate and respectful.
- Be concise as you may only have 15- or 20-minutes total, and it is important to leave time for questions.
- Take notes using the meeting tracker – enclosed in this toolkit is a template meeting tracker chart.

Step 3: Following up after the meeting.

- Connect with OASIS through the Executive Coordinator (executivecoordinator@oasisonline.ca) to let them know how the meeting(s) with your local MPP went. Also use this time to raise questions



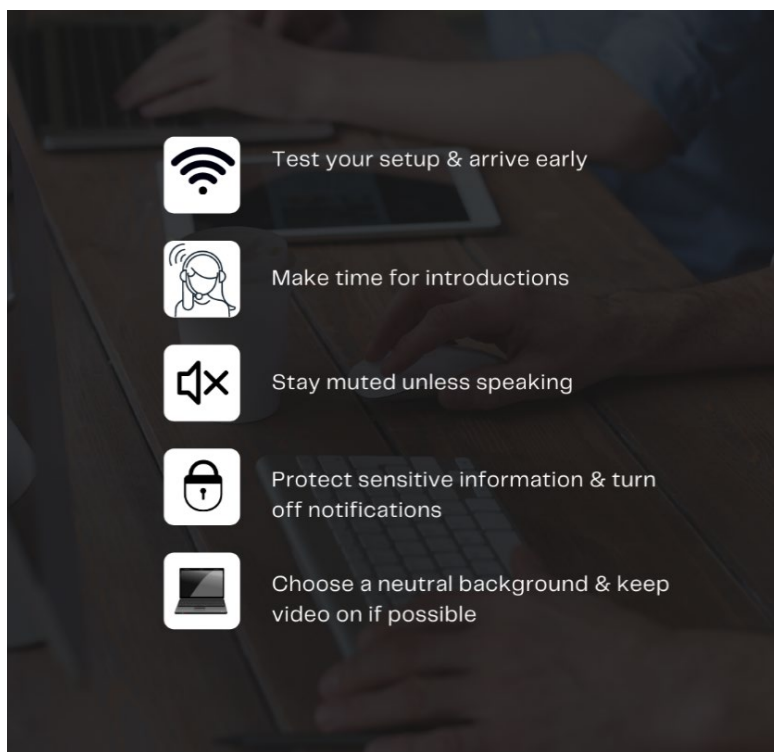
and information requests, particularly if the MPP is interested in learning more about OASIS' priorities.

- Send a “thank you” email to the MPP.
- Send briefing materials, as promised, in follow-up email.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

While an increasing number of meetings are once again being held in person, some MPPs may still opt to conduct some meetings virtually through either Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or another virtual meeting platform.

Here are some important reminders to consider when conducting virtual meetings.





KEY MESSAGES

(Further key messages and additional information can be found in the briefing materials)

- OASIS' 190+ member agencies support approximately 65,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities across Ontario and employ approximately 25,000 full and part-time staff. OASIS member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services in Ontario.
- COVID-19 demonstrated the critical importance of safe, high-quality care for people living with developmental disabilities.
- OASIS welcomes the vision of the Ontario Government's sector reform plan – *Journey to Belonging* – a multi-year plan released in 2021 and developed with comprehensive sector input.
- We believe that a fair, seamless transition and transformation that protects individuals living with disabilities must be our shared commitment.
- There is no need to go back and reinvent the wheel. We can't afford to spend the next several years working on another refreshed statement of values or framework of principles. That work has been done. We need a commitment to real action.
- Fulfilling the vision of a sustainable DS sector as outlined in *Journey to Belonging* rests on funding that ensures the long-term sustainability of the sector, the individuals and families we support.
- This is reflected in three essential pillars: **staffing, housing and better collaboration with health care**.
- **Pillar #1 – Staffing: Maintaining Workforce Stability and Sustainability**
 - DSWs perform challenging and specialized work that keeps individuals healthy and safe while providing enriching programs and vital services.
 - The \$3/hour wage enhancement for developmental services workers (DSWs) was critical for immediate workforce stabilization during the pandemic.
 - Nevertheless, the developmental services (DS) sector is confronting a significant skills and labour shortage – exacerbated by educational barriers. This was already happening before the pandemic and has only been intensified by it.
 - **SOLUTION**
 - We need the Ontario Government to lead the development and implementation of a fully funded sector workforce strategy to attract more staff and to provide ongoing stability for the specialized developmental services workforce.
 - This is necessary to help attract and retain creative, compassionate and highly capable frontline staff which will be crucial to realizing the vision set out in *Journey to Belonging*.



- **Pillar #2 – Housing: Tackling the Developmental Services Housing Crisis**
 - There is an urgent need to address the deepening housing crisis for people in Ontario living with developmental disabilities.
 - Addressing the housing gap for individuals living with developmental disabilities, and providing the necessary capital investment, is a foundational need if sustainable sector reform is to be achieved.
 - **SOLUTION**
 - There is an immediate opportunity to meet this significant need by earmarking 10% of funding in the upcoming phase (anticipated to launch in 2023) of the Canada-Ontario National Housing Strategy Bilateral Agreement to support the construction and rehabilitation of developmental services supportive housing.
 - By prioritizing and requiring that a portion of funds be dedicated to DS supportive housing, local municipalities and developmental services agencies can work together to determine how funds are used locally to address housing needs for adults living with developmental disabilities.

- **Pillar #3 – Better Collaboration: Bridge the Developmental Services Gap Between Community Services, Education and Health Care**
 - The interaction and collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has long been a weak point in our efforts to support individuals living with developmental disabilities.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic helped reduce traditional barriers within government – we can't afford to lose this progress.
 - Bridging the developmental services gap between community services, education and health will provide better care that will increase the life expectancy and quality of life of people living with developmental disabilities.
 - **SOLUTION**
 - Regularly bring together senior officials from MOH, MCCSS and other key ministries to develop policy and operational protocols to improve care outcomes, bridging the gap between health and developmental services.

Q&A

Q. What else does the sector need?

- A. To be clear, there are many other issues facing the DS sector, however, the priorities outlined in our briefing materials are the top priorities for OASIS and the DS sector in Ontario.

Addressing these key issues will be an important step in ensuring the success of overall ongoing DS sector reform. They will have a significant positive impact on the well-being of the individuals we care for in this community as well as their families.

(If this question does come up, agencies should focus on a specific local issue within the three pillars of staffing, housing and better collaboration within government)

Q. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services recently released its long-term vision for developmental services sector reform, *Journey to Belonging*. What is your position on what the government has proposed?

- A. OASIS has always supported sustainable reform in the DS sector.

We have been involved directly with the consultations with the sector through our membership and involvement with the Minister's Table on Reform.

While still early days, we welcome the recognition that this is a long and complex process that will evolve over the next decade and require ongoing involvement from DS agencies.

It is crucial that Ontario's next government commit to and support a sustainable future for Ontario's DS sector through properly funded reform guided by the existing *Journey to Belonging* framework.

There is no need to go back and reinvent the wheel. We can't afford to spend the next several years working on another refreshed statement of values or framework of principles.

That work has been done.

We need a commitment to real action.

Going forward, meaningful and impactful DS reform must ensure that things are better, not just different. The current state of the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic must be treated as the new status quo on which to build, and it must be appropriately funded.

Q. What is the difference between a PSW and a DSW? Are there differences in compensation? Are there any PSWs working in the DS sector?

- A. While similar, there are also fundamental differences between PSWs and DSWs. These include:



- Different education requirements, with DSWs required to complete a 2-year diploma program, while PSWs have access to a 6-8 month accelerated diploma program with an accompanying tuition subsidy.
- PSWs are primarily located in long-term care settings, with a smaller number supporting seniors in their homes. DSWs work in a variety of location types including small group homes, individual family homes and all types of community settings from workplaces to recreational settings.
- PSWs are concentrated in elder care, with a focus on maintaining daily living skills as well as health and safety. DSWs work with a much wider range of ages, from children to seniors, living with a broad range of developmental disabilities.
- Differences in compensation, which has increased at a greater rate for PSWs than DSWs over the past decade (68% vs. 17% respectively).

Some PSWs are employed by DS agencies in Ontario, particularly in Northern communities, where the availability of qualified DSWs is limited and PSWs are employed to help maintain the necessary complement of staff.

Q. Are there educational requirements to become a DSW? If so, where can a person receive this education/vocational training? What makes a DS Sector worker uniquely qualified to support individuals living with developmental disabilities?

- A. DSWs receive specialized education and training to prepare them to support the unique and complex needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. In Ontario, DSWs require the completion of a 2-year diploma program to be fully qualified.

Several colleges in Ontario provide these diploma programs, including Algonquin, Centennial, Conestoga, Durham, Fanshawe, George Brown, Humber, Loyalist, Mohawk, and Sheridan, among others.

Specific program curriculum varies by institution, but all graduates receive training in:

- Educational support processes;
- Crisis intervention;
- Pharmacology; and
- Counselling and interview skills

Students also receive hands-on training through placements, giving them first-hand experience on how to professionally and successfully react and manage individual and family needs.



Q. There have been recent government investments in PSW's and Nurses (i.e., enhanced PSW training and retention incentive of up to \$5,000 per person for nurses) how have these investments impacted the DS Sector?

- A. We are happy to see any new investments in the Health and Social Services sectors that help to improve supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and that sees staff respected with fair compensation for the essential work they do.

However, these types of investments must be done across ministries and in collaboration and in consideration of the wider Health and Social Services sector as a whole. They cannot continue to be done in silos.

We are very grateful for the Ontario Government's actions to make the \$3/hour wage enhancement for DSWs permanent. This is a critical foundational step to support workforce stability in the DS sector to help ensure that that individuals with developmental disabilities continue to benefit from excellent supports and services.

Nevertheless, the DS sector continues to face a significant skills and labour shortage. This has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Our agencies are facing intense competition for skilled workers, particularly from the Personal Support Workers (PSW) sector.

Making the current wage enhancement permanent is a necessary first step to help attract and retain creative, compassionate, and highly capable frontline staff and is vital to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities continue to receive the excellent services they need.

Looking ahead, a comprehensive sector staffing strategy – with the funding support required to fulfil it – is necessary to attract frontline staff that will be crucial to realizing the vision set out in *Journey to Belonging*.

A standardisation of salaries and wages across the province, with a minimum standard of pay that would have regular cost of living increases would be a strong way moving forward to help attract more staff to work in the sector.

Q. What, if any, other steps did the Ontario Government take to support the DS sector during the pandemic?

- A. In addition to implementing the \$3/hour wage enhancement and making it permanent, the Ontario Government took many steps during the pandemic to recognize the important care and services that DS sector staff and agencies provide.

This included giving us the necessary supports to keep both the individuals we support and our front-line staff safe, such as:

- \$40 million in emergency funding within the first month of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to address immediate financial and service delivery pressures confronted by DS agencies;

- An Emergency Order for the DS sector to provide immediate flexibility for staffing and work assignments to ensure that agencies were able to provide the vulnerable people they serve with the services and supports they needed; and
- \$361 million in new DS sector support funding announced as part of the 2021/22 Ontario Budget.

Q. Do most DS sector agencies provide both day and residential support programs?

A. While some DS agencies may specialize in one or the other, most agencies offer a variety of services, including residential and day programs. Other supports provided can include:

- Community Participation supports such as daily living skills, employment supports and recreational activities;
- Caregiver respite to provide relief for parents or caregiver of an individual; and
- Specialized services such as speech and language therapy.

Agencies can also offer a wide variety of different residential supports that can include:

- Supported Group Living environments such as group homes;
- Supported independent living, which has individuals living at home with support as needed; and
- Specialised Accommodation that is unique to an individual's needs and circumstances.

All of this depends on the agency, their size, staff count etc.

Q. How many housing units will be created by this proposed targeted investment in DS housing?

A. 10% investment of remaining National Housing Strategy funds, which is proportional to the percentage of individuals living with developmental disabilities on Ontario's affordable housing waitlists, will achieve, at least:

- Build more than 2,400 new units of housing – at least 1,200 new units province-wide in each of Phase 2 & 3, demonstrating Ontario's national leadership and exceeding the province's benchmark target under the National Housing Strategy;
- Help maintain the 12,691 units currently housing adults with developmental disabilities; and
- Repair more than 2,500 – 20% - of these existing units to bring them up to a good state of repair.

Q. What is the “housing gap” that individuals living with developmental disabilities are facing in Ontario?

A. According to Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé’s 2016 report, Nowhere to Turn:

- In 2014, nearly as many people living with developmental disabilities were on the wait list for suitable supportive housing (13,000) as were currently living in appropriate housing in Ontario (15,246);
- Between 2014 and 2016, only 800 adults received the needed housing support – a mere 6% of the 2014 wait list;
- Each year, the housing wait list for people living with developmental disabilities increases by about 1,200 people;
- Wait times for housing are 10 times longer for those with a developmental disability compared to the average person waiting for affordable housing.

Q. Where do individuals living with developmental disabilities live when they can’t find appropriate housing and are no longer able to live with their parents or caregivers?

A. Without enough appropriate housing options to support the growing population of adults living with a developmental disability, unsuitable and expensive alternatives are used.

- Individuals with developmental disabilities spend more time than any other population in hospital emergency, acute and especially alternate level of care (ALC) beds;
- Long-term care (LTC) facilities and nursing homes are increasingly being used as housing for adults with developmental disabilities under the age of 65;
- In 2017, research found that adults with developmental disabilities are admitted to long-term care approximately 25 years earlier than the rest of the population, and that annual rates of admission to long-term care are on average 4.5 times higher.
- Many of the less fortunate also wind up in the shelter system, where 18-30% of chronic shelter users have a developmental disability.



BRIEFING MATERIALS

(Enclosed as a separate .PDF document that can be shared with MPPs and staff in advance of your meeting)



TEMPLATE MEETING TRACKER

Meeting Details	Name of MPP: Riding: Party: Staff in Attendance:
OASIS Meeting Attendees	
Meeting Tone (Positive/Negative, Supportive/Not Supportive)	
Summary of Meeting Discussion	
Questions from MPP/Staff	
Commitments Made by MPP/Staff	
OASIS Follow-up Action Items	



TEMPLATE MEETING REQUEST EMAIL

This is a sample meeting request email that you can send to your local MPP – just remember to remove all italicized placeholders and replace them with the appropriate information.

[MONTH] XX, 2023

*[Mr./Ms.] [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME]
[MPP, Riding Name]*

Via email: *[EMAIL]*

Dear *[Mr./Mr.]/[MPP LAST NAME]*,

On behalf of *[Insert local OASIS member agency]*, I am reaching out to request a meeting to discuss the impact of the developmental services (DS) sector and the important support we provide on behalf of individuals living with developmental disabilities we serve in *[Electoral district or community]*.

[Insert local context about OASIS member agency]

We look forward to meeting with you at a time of your convenience in the upcoming weeks to discuss important priorities for the developmental services sector that are vital to our continuing ability to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in *[Electoral district or community]* have access to the supports and care that they need.

To confirm your availability, or if you have any questions, please contact me at *[contact details]*. We eagerly look forward to meeting with you and will follow up to confirm the details.

Sincerely,
[Insert your name]



TEMPLATE THANK YOU EMAIL

This is a sample thank you email that you can send to the MPP following your meeting – just remember to remove all italicized placeholders and replace them with the appropriate information.

[MONTH] XX, 2023

*[Mr./Ms.] [FIRST NAME] [LAST NAME]
[MPP, Riding Name]*

Via email: *[EMAIL]*

Dear *[MR./MS.] [MPP LAST NAME]*,

On behalf of *[Insert local agency]* and Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS), thank you for taking the time to meet with *[me or us]* on *[date]*. *[I or We]* appreciated the opportunity to discuss the critical role that we fulfil for individuals living with developmental disabilities and their families living in *[electoral district or community]* and across Ontario, and the importance of our priority issues to ensure the sustainability of the DS sector so we can continue to perform essential work in our community. We appreciate your support.

[Reiterate any relevant commitment to support OASIS' priorities and speak to others in their respective party]

[Reiterate any relevant details from the visit]

[Provide answers to any questions they raised that you committed to following up on]

We look forward to continue this conversation going forward. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at *[your email address]*.

Sincerely,
[Insert your name]



FINDING YOUR LOCAL MPP

If you don't know your MPP's name or your Riding / Electoral district, to Find the most up to date contact information, please enter the postal code of your organisation on the Elections Ontario website, found here: [https://voterinformationservice.elections.on.ca/en/election/search?mode=postal Code](https://voterinformationservice.elections.on.ca/en/election/search?mode=postal%20Code) and it will tell you the name of your Member of Provincial Parliament and their contact details. Again, please remember to enter the Postal Code of your organisation and not your home postal code.