



Protecting Sustainable Support for Adults Living with Developmental Disabilities

- Approximately 70,000 people in Ontario live with a developmental disability. They are supported by over 200 agencies funded by the provincial government to provide housing, day programs, employment training, and other services.
 - *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 waitlist grows by about 1,200 every year.*
- Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a member-driven organisation, formed to, amongst other things, share information and resources as well as to liaise with government and advocate as one group on behalf of all its member agencies.
- OASIS' 190+ member agencies are in every town and city across the province and serve over 65,000 individuals with developmental disabilities and employ 25,000 full and part-time staff. OASIS member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services in Ontario.
- Our member agencies, their staff, and the individuals and families they support are at a critical point.
- The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the developmental services (DS) sector. Normal routines were disrupted, in-person relationships shifted to virtual, and traditional services and supports changed almost overnight.
- The pandemic also demonstrated the critical importance of safe, high-quality care for people living with developmental disabilities.
- It is crucial that the government support a sustainable future for Ontario's DS sector through properly funded reform guided by *Journey to Belonging*– a multi-year plan released in 2021 and developed with comprehensive sector input.
- Fulfilling the vision of a sustainable DS sector as outlined in *Journey to Belonging* rests on three essential pillars: **staffing, housing and better collaboration with health care.**



Priority #1 – Staffing

Strengthening the Sector by Creating a Sustainable and Stable Workforce

- The \$3/hour wage enhancement for developmental services workers (DSWs) was critical for immediate workforce stabilization during the pandemic. However, the developmental services (DS) sector is confronting a significant skills and labour shortage – this was true before the pandemic and has only been exacerbated by it. A lack of educational and training incentives only furthers the issue. DSWs do not currently have access to the same tuition subsidies currently available to Personal Support Workers (PSW).
 - In March of 2022, investments were made into training, education, and retention of nurses and PSWs to create a stronger and more resilient health care system, but DSWs were not included in this.
 - PSWs were encouraged to join the sector through the province's financial support program that covered costs up to \$13,690 per student for enrolling in programs at private career colleges. DSWs do not currently have access to similar incentives, despite requiring more training and education (2 Year program to become a DSW vs. a 6–8-month program for PSWs).
 - Budget 2023 included additional supports for PSWs, including:
 - *A dual credit program.*
 - *credits towards secondary school diplomas and health care programs for high school students;*
 - and*
 - *a \$1.2M commitment to assist with recruitment.*
 - DSWs were not included in any of these incentives, despite specifically asking for similar incentives for PSWs go to DSWs in our Pre-Budget submissions and presentations.
 - These types of investments that exclude DSWs will continue to create bigger issues and labour shortages for the DS Sector moving forward.
- Part of the sector's challenges with retaining skilled workers is the fact that salaries cannot compete with those in other public and private sectors. DSWs are typically paid less than PSWs and there is a general lack of standardization in compensation across agencies and regions of Ontario. We have also seen a pattern emerging where staff are hired and trained by DS agencies, only to see them quickly leave for higher paying jobs in hospitals, schools, and government.
- The 2022 Ontario Fall Economic Statement announced that core Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) funding would be indexed to inflation, recognizing the need for adjustments over time as cost-of-living expenses rise across the country.
 - While this is a welcome change, the staff supporting people who receive ODSP similarly require continual increases to their wages to prevent an erosion of income over time.

Solution:

- OASIS recommends that the Ontario Government lead the development and implementation of a fully funded sector workforce strategy to attract and retain more staff and to provide ongoing stability for the specialized developmental services workforce, by:
 - aligning training, education, and compensation incentives for DSWs with those available to PSWs.
 - aligning with other sectors by creating incremental cost of living increases tied to inflation for all DS employees.
- A comprehensive sector staffing strategy – with the funding support required to fulfil it – is necessary to attract and retain the creative, compassionate, and highly capable frontline staff that will be crucial to realizing the vision set out in *Journey to Belonging*.



Priority #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.
- The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the critical importance of appropriate housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities, both to keep them healthy while allowing them to live safe, fulfilling lives in a supported environment.
- Yet for over a decade, Ontario's provincial investment in developmental services housing has been virtually frozen despite the large and growing need, driven by aging caregivers and changing complexity of existing cases.
- Wait times for supportive housing are 10 times longer for those with a developmental disability compared to those waiting for affordable housing.
- In 2014, 15,246 people with intellectual disabilities were living in appropriate housing. A further 13,000 were waiting for housing. Since then, the waitlist has grown by about 1,200 every year. As a result:
 - *thousands of young people are living in long-term care or alternate level of care beds in hospitals, occupying expensive, inappropriate, and desperately needed bed spaces.*
 - *Appropriate housing helps to keep people healthy while allowing them to live safe, fulfilling lives in a supported environment.*
 - *It also means that they can access care in their communities, rather than leaning on emergency supports such as hospital and long-term care.*
- 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.
- Although developmental services housing was included as an eligible funding recipient under the National Housing Strategy, very little of the Phase 1 funding provided to municipalities to expand this desperately needed housing, as it was not specifically prioritized in the province's program design.
- 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.

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.



Priority #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.
- Bridging the gap between health care and developmental services is necessary to increase the life expectancy, quality of life and autonomy of people living with developmental disabilities.
- A 2019 study by IC/ES, CAMH, University of Ontario Institutes of Technology and Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) found “that people with developmental disabilities fare worse in the health system across multiple indicators. This includes significant worse outcomes compared against the overall population in terms of 30-day repeat emergency department visits, 30-day repeat hospitalizations, alternate level of care, long-term care and premature mortality.”
- Ontario’s DS sector has made exceptional efforts to successfully protect and support the individuals we care for, despite a frequent lack of prioritization for this population, engagement barriers with public health units and limited cross-ministerial collaboration.
- 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 and reflecting the continuum of support and care needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Establishing a process to improve continuing education for regulated health professionals to ensure that the health needs of those with developmental disabilities are considered and onsite developmental service sector learning opportunities.
- Supporting the inclusion of developmental service agencies in all Ontario Health Teams