



Key Messages

These are not meant to be fulsome and are meant as a guide for you to keep in mind as you prepare your submission or make a presentation. Don't feel the need to include everything, summarise as much as possible. And always be sure to add your own local experience and individual pressures and challenges.

Challenges Faced by the Developmental Services (DS) Sector

- The DS sector is experiencing a significant labour shortage, with low wages and limited training incentives. Developmental Services Workers (DSWs) often leave for better-paying roles in hospitals, schools, and other public sectors, resulting in a shortage of qualified staff to support people with developmental disabilities.
- Increased numbers of people are entering the system with complex needs, including health and mental health challenges, putting immense strain on service providers with already limited resources.
- **More than 50,000 adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario are on waitlists** for critical services and supportive housing. For many, this means waiting indefinitely for the services they need to live healthy, supported, and safe lives. For families, the wait is not just a number. It represents lost opportunities for early intervention, essential supports, and community inclusion.
- The current funding model has left service agencies struggling to meet demand, leading to programme closures and staff shortages.
- The lack of necessary financial support places organisations and staff at risk and ultimately **creates the possibility of fewer, and lower quality, services and supports for people living with developmental disabilities in Ontario.**
- In addition, the housing crisis has left tens of thousands without appropriate housing. People are often forced into inappropriate settings such as hospitals and long-term care facilities, which are both costly and unsuitable.

Funding History

- We appreciate the Ontario Government's commitment of a portion of the **\$310 million outlined in the 2024 budget**, equating to an approximate **3%** increase for Developmental Services (DS) agency base budgets. This is a positive step toward supporting the sector.
- Despite the 3% increase, this investment is not enough to address the historical funding shortfall. Between 2013 and 2024, agency base funding increased by only **5.2%**, while the cost of living rose by **30%**.
- While any additional resources allocated to the DS Sector are always appreciated, the lack of necessary financial support places organisations and staff at risk and ultimately **creates the possibility**

of fewer, and lower quality, services and supports for people living with developmental disabilities in Ontario.

- Even with the announced increase, **80% of agencies** surveyed are still projecting a deficit in 2025/2026; this means:
 - *Reductions in staff*
 - *Reductions in service and programming*
 - *Reduction in building repairs*
 - *Reductions in housing and housing supports.*
 - *And by extension, all of this represents a reduction in the safety and security of those we support.*
- With increased demands, skyrocketing costs, and a profound human resource and labour shortage, the system of care that has existed to ensure the safety and well-being of Ontarians with developmental disabilities is **facing collapse**.

Urgent Need for Action

- Recent investments and efforts are appreciated but more support is needed to address the ongoing crisis in the DS sector.
- Cutbacks in response to underfunding are leading to increasing pressure on families, as well as on the health care, mental health, long-term care, and shelter systems. We need adequate and appropriate funding for the sector to provide effective services and supports that ensure safety, security, and quality of life.
- Adequate funding is crucial to provide effective services and supports that ensure safety, security, and quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities.
- We call for a collaborative, comprehensive wait-list strategy to be developed as part of the "*Journey to Belonging*" vision to end waitlists for services. This strategy should involve sustained funding and consultation with the developmental services sector, families, and individuals to reduce waitlists and ensure equitable access to services.
- **A balanced funding model that provides both direct support to people and sustained funding to agencies** is needed, along with **stabilizing the DS workforce through educational and other incentives, as well as expanding community-based housing options** and reducing wait times for supportive housing. This approach will help stabilise the DS sector and prevent the collapse of essential services, ensuring that no one is left waiting for a safe, inclusive, and supported future.

KEY ASKS:

We welcome the vision of the Ontario Government's sector reform plan – *Journey to Belonging* – however, a fair, funded, seamless transition and transformation that protects individuals living with disabilities must be our shared commitment.

Decades of underfunding has left Ontario's developmental services sector facing unprecedented challenges and tremendous strain.

The foundation for a successful transformation must be appropriate funding and a plan that ensures the long-term sustainability of the sector including the individuals and families we support and the workers who care for them. This Includes:

- ***Strengthening the Sector by creating a Sustainable and Stable Workforce***
- ***Ending waitlists and providing direct support for individuals and families alongside sustained agency funding.***
- ***Tackling the Developmental Services Housing Crisis***

1. Strengthening the Sector by creating a Sustainable and Stable Workforce

- The DS sector is facing a **severe skills and labour shortage** due to uncompetitive salaries and limited educational and training incentives.
- Many staff leave DS agencies for better-paying jobs in hospitals, schools, and government after being trained—exacerbating the issue.
- Workforce gaps negatively affect individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, often pushing families into **crisis situations**.
- Insufficient support leads to unnecessary reliance on hospitals, shelter systems, and crisis services, which are **far more expensive than community care**.
- Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) lack access to tuition subsidies and training incentives available to similar roles, such as **Personal Support Workers (PSWs)**.
- Personal Support Workers (PSW) received educational incentives in the 2023 Budget, including preparing high school students for health care careers through dual credits, and direct funding to support recruitment efforts for PSWs. This is on top of the 2022 investments to training and education for PSWs. These incentives were increased further in the November 2023 announcement when the province announced \$300 million over three years to launch careers as personal support workers. Programmes such as **the Learn and Stay Grant** are also available to PSWs.
- There are no similar incentives for DSWs, despite requiring more training and education due to the increased vulnerability of the people they serve. (2 Year programme to become a DSW vs. a 6–8-month programme for PSWs). DSWs are typically paid less than PSWs and there is a general lack of standardization in compensation across agencies and regions of Ontario.
- Colleges are also seeing a significant rise in international students pursuing DSW programmes, but the recent Federal cap on international students could **reduce the pool of future workers**, compounding the crisis.

OASIS Recommendation

- **Align training and education incentives for DSWs with those of PSWs** to create parity and make the sector more attractive to new workers.
- Extend the **Learn and Stay Grant** to DSWs to support tuition costs, promote retention, and stabilise the workforce.
- Addressing these workforce challenges is essential to ensuring **sustainable, high-quality care** for individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Supporting DSWs with fair training incentives is a **cost-effective solution** to alleviate pressure on more expensive systems like hospitals and shelters.

2. Ending waitlists and providing direct support for individuals and families alongside sustained agency funding.

- We acknowledge and sincerely appreciate the Ontario Government's **\$310 million investment in social services**, including the approximate **3% increase to Developmental Service agency budgets** in 2024.
- This funding is a **critical and welcome step** toward strengthening developmental service agencies and improving support for individuals and families.
- Despite the 3% increase, developmental services remain significantly underfunded. Over 30 years, agencies have received cumulative base funding increases of **less than 7%**, while the **cost of living has risen nearly 70%**.
- The sector faces growing waitlists, **increased demand**, and a surge in **complex needs**, such as health-related and mental health challenges.
- Approximately **1 in 3 adults with a developmental disability in Ontario** is on a waitlist for essential services, supportive housing, or community programmes.
- Decades of insufficient funding have forced agencies to project deficits, resulting in:
 - **Reductions in existing services and programming.**
 - **Deferred building repairs and cuts to housing supports.**
 - **Increased uncertainty for individuals and families who depend on these services.**
- For individuals on waitlists, this means waiting to belong, hoping for housing, and lacking the critical supports needed to thrive in their communities.
- Without action, the **system of care is at risk of collapse**, further endangering the safety and security of those who rely on developmental services.
- Indexing ODSP funding to inflation was a **positive and necessary step**, recognising the rising cost of living. However, **developmental service agencies and staff** supporting people on ODSP need similar recognition and support to address ongoing financial pressures.

OASIS Recommendation

- As part of the vision set out in *Journey to Belonging*, develop and implement a **comprehensive sector waitlist strategy**, preferably led by a developmental services agency with input from individuals, families, and service providers.
- Combine this strategy with **sustainable funding increases for agencies** and **incentives for workforce retention** to stabilise the sector and reduce waitlists.
- These long-term investments are essential to:
 - *Stabilize agencies and reduce waitlists.*
 - *Foster innovative, sustainable solutions to meet the needs of a growing population.*
 - *Ensure equitable access to care so that no one is left waiting for a future where they can belong and thrive.*

3. Tackling the Developmental Services Housing Crisis

- The developmental services housing crisis is urgent and growing, with over **28,000 people waiting for supportive housing as of 2024, compared to 18,152 in 2018—a 55% increase in the waitlist.**
- At the same time, fewer people are being supported, with a **5% decrease in those served since 2018.**
- **Wait times for supportive housing for individuals with developmental disabilities are 10 times longer than those waiting for affordable housing.**
- Thousands of individuals with developmental disabilities are **forced into inappropriate and costly settings**, such as long-term care facilities or alternate level-of-care hospital beds, exacerbating strain on the healthcare and other social systems.
- Families are often pushed to crisis points, with some contemplating desperate measures, such as abandoning their loved ones, to access necessary supports.
- Without consistent capital funding for repairs or new housing, the crisis will continue to worsen, leaving families and individuals without safe, stable, and suitable housing options.
- **Community-based housing is more cost-effective and reduces reliance on emergency services, hospitals, and long-term care facilities.**

OASIS Recommendation

- The Ontario Government must prioritize the creation of **a dedicated housing stream for individuals with developmental disabilities**, with specific funding mechanisms, such as:
 - **Committing 10% of the remaining funding from the Canada-Ontario National Housing Strategy Bilateral Agreement for this population.**
- Local municipalities, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, developmental service agencies, individuals, and families can work together on housing solutions tailored to local needs.
- Securing dedicated investment in housing for individuals with developmental disabilities will not only help address the housing crisis but also provide a pathway to dignity, belonging, and opportunity for thousands of Ontarians
- Expanding and diversifying housing options will create a more responsive and sustainable system across Ontario.
- We need to align housing efforts with a vision of community inclusion, enhanced independence, and meaningful choice for individuals with developmental disabilities.