



Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs
Agences ontariennes de soutien pour les personnes qui ont des besoins spéciaux

INFORMATION BULLETIN
TO MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT

September, 2009

Dear Member of the Ontario Legislature,

Welcome back to the Legislature. This Bulletin has been prepared to provide you, our provincial Members of Parliament, with information concerning topical issues and matters related to the Developmental Services sector. It is our hope that by keeping you informed about matters in our sector, you will be better informed to make decisions, ask questions, and support our collective efforts towards ensuring the highest quality of support and services for all Ontarians living with a Developmental Disability.

OASIS member organizations' provide services to citizens with a developmental disability in your riding. We appreciate the feedback that we have received from MPP's regarding previous issues, and look forward to sustaining that dialogue.

Labour Unrest

We are very concerned about a number of issues related to our labour relations with our respective unions. As you are no doubt aware, unions within our sector are preparing to align contract expiration dates with the next provincial election in 2011. This action is a result of the Government's direct intervention into the labour unrest which occurred in the summer of 2007, whereby striking agencies were awarded significant wage increases in order to end the strikes. We estimate that over 100 developmental service agencies will face the pressure of this union strategy in 2011. Clearly, such collective action by our unions would leave the sector in total distress and mayhem. Further, agencies will suffer tremendous financial strain as they prepare for the possibility of a work stoppage, as they hire security firms and replacement workers to ensure Ontario's most vulnerable citizens continue to receive the care and support they require.

Also related to the possibility of any work stoppage in our sector is the risk that striking employees will picket the homes where these individuals live. They are innocent victims in these disputes, yet are forced to deal with the stresses related to picketing activity by the unions. We implore the Government to initiate changes in the Labour Relations Act which would disallow the picketing of private homes in our communities. No other citizen has to bear this disruption in their private lives, and clearly the people we support deserve better protection to their privacy and quality of life than is currently afforded by the legislation.

In the budget of 2007 the government announced a four year funding commitment for this sector. This would have left the sector with a final increase in funding for the budget in 2010. While the fourth year funding was used early to help with the cost of settlements in 2007, many organizations did not understand this and have bargained wage increases in accordance with the original commitment. We urge the government to consider the needs of the Developmental Services Sector agencies in the upcoming budget.

Harmonized Sales Tax

OASIS members are very concerned about the potential negative impact the proposed HST will have on the entire not-for-profit sector. OASIS recognizes the efforts of the Ministry of Finance to offset this impact with the proposed proportional rebate of 82% for the provincial portion of the HST for qualifying non-profit organizations while maintaining eligibility for the 50% public service body rebate for the GST portion of the proposed HST. The proposed tax relief for people over three years of \$300 for eligible tax filers aged 18 and over is welcome news, however, may not be utilized by recipients of ODSP who do not or do not have the capability to file tax returns. OASIS looks forward to discussing and learning more about these proposals with the Minister of Finance in the near future.

Bill 77 – Services and Supports to promote the Social Inclusion of persons with Developmental Disabilities Act

OASIS remains committed to a continued collaborative partnership with the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) as we move forward with the transformation process in the Developmental Services sector.

While OASIS supports the introduction of a direct funding option to families and individuals, we need to ensure that mechanisms are in place to ensure continuity and quality of care is available when circumstances change for a family and/or individual.

The new Act appears to put more onus and responsibility on volunteer Board members of organizations. Attracting interested and knowledgeable members of our communities to govern our organizations is already a challenge for many. The Government must ensure that new regulations do not further frustrate this already difficult, yet important task.

Our members remain very concerned for the many families and individuals who remain without the required support in our communities. Often the Ministry are required to make difficult choices when faced with numerous initiatives and limited resources. This results in unaddressed needs by families and individuals in our communities who require intensive supports such as group living, while transitional aged youth or individuals who moved out of the facilities are given a priority. Similarly, now individuals being moved out of dual diagnosis wards from mental health facilities are bypassing those on waiting lists in the community. Some families in every community have waited for many years for services for their loved one(s). In accordance with the foundational goals of transformation (i.e. equitable, accessible, and sustainable), we urge the Government to respond with service expansion initiatives on their behalf so as to stem the tide of ever increasing waiting lists and growing frustration.

Intergovernmental Relations

There are many examples where we, as service providers, experience a lack of coordination and cooperation between Ministries of the same Government. Some glaring examples would be when the Ministry of Labour imposes a new law or regulation which has the direct effect of increasing costs to us as employers, yet there are no additional funds made available to offset the new cost (e.g. Family Day being declared as a statutory holiday); or municipalities having the right to impose restrictive bylaws about who can live where, when in a small group setting, only to be challenged at the Ontario Municipal Board at a very significant cost to the applicant, with every ruling being overturned; or municipalities being allowed to exceed provincial codes related to building, fire and health, forcing many organizations to spend tremendous amounts of money to comply, with no adjustment to their base budget. Clearly, it would be in everyone's best interest to ensure a better coordinated system whereby Ministries would consult with each other before passage of laws and regulations to determine the impact (financial or otherwise) across other governmental agencies and departments. Over the past few years, resulting from the wage gap initiative stemming from the labour unrest of '07 (see above), money flowed to transfer payment agencies to provide wage increases to workers funded under MCSS. However many agencies provide children services as well, funded under Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), and no money flowed for those workers. Those agencies which are unionized, could not increase one set of workers' wages without adjusting all wage levels in their agency. Yet no additional funds were made available for this, putting further strain on an already strained funding envelope. OASIS would be pleased to work with Government and various Ministries to assist them in providing a consistent and equitable approach to matters such as these to avoid inconsistent applications, inequitable funding, and increased predictability.

We sincerely thank you for taking the time to review our Bulletin, and hope that you will be able to support your local Developmental Service organizations by advocating on their behalf. We hope that you find this summary to be of assistance as you debate issues of social concern to the people of Ontario. We encourage you to obtain details on these matters from the OASIS website at: www.oasisonline.ca, or by contacting myself or your local agency representatives.

Sincerely,
Brian Young
President

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