



January 2021 Pre-Budget Submission

Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs

Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a volunteer-run, member-driven provincial organization. Our 190+ member agencies support children and adults with developmental disabilities in every corner of the province. We provide services to over 65,000 of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens and employ 25,000 full and part-time staff.

In this brief submission we are making the following key recommendations for the sustainability of the DS sector and the individuals and families it supports:

- **No Return to the Pre-Pandemic Status Quo**
- **Continue the \$3 per hour Wage Enhancement**
- **That Developmental Service Workers be seen as vital alongside Personal Support Workers and other front-line workers in Long-Term Care and Health**
- **Continue to work closely with the DS sector as the government looks to the first major reform of the sector in over 12 years**
- **Work with the ministry on how the \$361 Million in new funding for the sector announced in the Autumn 2020 Budget will be allocated to address the sector's pressure points**
- **Commit 10% of the National Housing Strategy funding to a prioritized investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities**

No Return to the Pre-Pandemic Status Quo

Our key message is this: The sector cannot return to the pre-pandemic status quo. There remains amongst our member agencies a strong consensus that the sector cannot function in any form of its pre-COVID-19 state. This is a key factor that must be clearly understood as you look ahead to any form of economic recovery post-COVID-19, and any efforts to reform the sector

We want to acknowledge the government's ongoing support of the developmental services sector during the pandemic and the measures that have moved the sector forward and that need to continue including:

- The flexibility that was granted by emergency orders, that our member agencies have sought for years, including how agency budgets and Passport funds can be spent.
- The fast tracking of technology, as a valuable tool for supports and services, and has been providing many opportunities and efficiencies for the sector and the individuals we serve.
- The individuals we support have housing, health, and education needs and the pandemic has demonstrated that our sector needs to have broader engagement with government. As we look ahead, it is clear that while the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) is our funding Ministry, it cannot be the only ministry that engages with our sector.

The sector appreciates the acknowledgement by the Government that that Developmental Service Workers are as critical as Personal Support Workers and other front-line workers in Long-Term Care and Health. Any look forward must therefore start from where we are today.

The services we provide are funded by government and by local fundraising. The latter has taken a significant hit over the course of the past year. Our dependence on public funding to provide the critical and necessary services we deliver has never been greater. While we can be optimistic that by the end of the calendar year the pandemic should hopefully be under greater control, its ongoing impacts will continue well into 2022.

Continue the \$3 per hour Wage Enhancement

One of the most important actions the government took early in the pandemic was to implement the \$3 temporary wage enhancement. This has had a substantial positive impact on helping to stabilize the sector during these unprecedented and challenging times. We realize that the temporary wage enhancement is currently set to end in March and we are asking that it continue. As with long-term care staff, the additional wage enhancements have allowed DS workers to continue to provide essential care to some of the most vulnerable people in Ontario.

We are concerned that removing the wage enhancements, especially while the pandemic is ongoing and with the potential of major reforms, will have a considerable detrimental effect not only on staff, but the individuals they support. These higher wages have led to more engaged and satisfied DS workers, which leads to safer and more focused individuals and peace of mind for families. In research done by one of our member agencies, they saw a significant reduction in the number of absences taken once the wage enhancements were introduced. Showing that fairly compensated, valued, and engaged staff take fewer absences. In addition, because of the fewer absences taken there has been less need for agencies to fill shifts with outside workers. Which means that individuals have been supported by trained and experienced staff familiar with their unique needs rather than by more costly, less experienced staffing agency workers.

The pandemic-related compensation enhancements have produced better outcomes for individuals, families and staff. In the short term, for these trends to continue, DS workers must continue to receive the wage enhancements beyond March. An additional effect has also been creating more room for consumer spending by DS staff which makes a direct contribution to local economies.

In the longer term, a key part of the reform discussion needs to be the province wide harmonization of salaries and wages with a sector wide minimum standard of pay that would have regular cost of living increases. This would not only help attract and retain more staff it would lead to providing better quality of services. We have seen the issues in the long-term care sector and we need these supports to ensure our developmental disability agencies never face those same devastating results. The DS workforce which is providing an essential service needs to be appropriately compensated at all levels,

Sector Reform and Allocating Recent Investments

OASIS applauds the government's announcement of an additional \$361 Million for the developmental services (DS) sector in the Autumn 2020 Budget. This investment would be important at any time. However, given the fiscal challenges the province is facing, with so many competing needs related to the ongoing global pandemic, we view these as a significant and meaningful recognition of our sector and its unique challenges. This investment represents a significant injection of new funds and capacity in the DS system, which will help thousands of individuals with intellectual disabilities, their families, and the agencies who support them.

We are however, concerned with the lack of clarity on how this new money will be specifically allocated, when it will start to roll out and how it will impact the sector's budget going forward and specifically on how \$361 Million in new

funding will be integrated and applied to providing the supports necessary for individuals receiving care and waiting for care in the post-COVID context.

We understand that this will be used for existing stress points within the system, however, with no clarity we're not certain. We're also not clear how, or if, this will go in any way to support the current reform agenda, which will need investment if it is going to be successful. OASIS is uniquely and well positioned to assist the government in determining where best to focus these funds, and what additional funding will be required to support the anticipated MCCSS focus on reforming the sector. We are looking forward to continuing to work with MCCSS on reforming the sector.

Commit 10% of the National Housing Strategy funding to a prioritized investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities

There is a desperate need for more and adequate housing for people with developmental disabilities, a need that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. We support the recommendation, made by our member agencies Community Living Toronto and REENA, to commit 10% of the National Housing Strategy funding to a prioritized investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities.

Conclusion

Throughout the pandemic, our membership has demonstrated an eagerness and ability to reimagine how individuals are supported, how services and staffing are structured and how the sector works with the health care system and other government partners. The government needs to work with us, through the existing reform tables, to ensure these initiatives continue and grow and that we never return to the pre-pandemic status quo.

As part of the government's support for Ontarians and recovery plan, and given the ongoing severity of the pandemic, we recommend that developmental service workers be included in any supports, such as a pandemic fund or health contingency fund, that are ear marked for health care, long-term care, housing and other essential workers. Recognising that throughout the pandemic we have often been included with these other groups, we need to consistently be treated as other essential workers. Notwithstanding the availability of a vaccine, it is clear that most Ontarians will not be vaccinated for quite some time, and that the impact of the ongoing pandemic will require government support and funding well into the 2021/2022 fiscal year. DS should have access to these funds.

While the DS sector has so far avoided many of the issues facing long-term care, we do not know what will happen as the year progresses. DS workers are vital, critical workers, who every day do dangerous and difficult work, that not only ensures the health and safety of some of the most vulnerable in our society but also help prevent further hospitalizations. They need to be recognized as such.

We know that the Ontario government has a long road ahead and difficult decisions to make, both now and in the future. The pandemic has offered us an opportunity to work together to reform and modernize the sector like never before, based on evidence as well as the advice and guidance of our member agencies, families and individuals. OASIS reaffirms its commitment to continue working with the government to accomplish these and other goals.