



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

**Pre-Budget Submission
Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs
January 2020**

Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a volunteer-run, member-driven provincial organization. Our 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. Our 190+ member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services funded by the Ministry of Children's, Community and Social Services.

OASIS is eager to work with government to help address the challenges being faced by families and individuals with developmental disabilities and the opportunities to modernize the sector. We recognize the fiscal challenges facing the province and believe that only in working together can we resolve these challenges. Our member agencies are lean and efficient organizations, and understand the need to extract value from every dollar of public or donor funds.

We know that the government has difficult decisions ahead to restore balance and confidence in public finances. OASIS has continually made clear our desire to work with the government to modernize how developmental services are delivered across the province and we are eager to help identify solutions to make the sector more efficient and sustainable. OASIS is seeking productive and meaningful engagement with government as decisions around service transformation for individuals, families, and agencies are made.

1. Formal and meaningful consultations with individuals, families, and the DS sector bringing all of us to the table *before* decisions are made

The government has confirmed that a third-party consultant has been engaged since September 2019 to complete a review of the DS sector and to recommend ways to maximize efficiency and modernize the sector, looking to other jurisdictions for ideas and solutions. OASIS has not been advised of the timelines for the final report or when the report and recommendations will be made public. Looking ahead, we would urge the

government to learn from other jurisdictions to ensure that modernization is properly funded, avoiding disruption to critical services and ensuring a smooth transition.

OASIS is asking that the government work with our sector and engage in substantive and meaningful formal consultations with people with developmental disabilities, their families, and the agencies that support them, before any decisions are made.

We have concrete suggestions that we are eager to share through this process. We have developed and previously shared ideas that could save time and money, as well as free-up our sector to deliver higher-value work more efficiently. These include removing unnecessary bureaucracy by streamlining Quality Assurance Measures and allowing accreditation instead, creating more choice for families and agencies. This allows transitions to individualized budgeting solutions and lets agencies develop opportunities for amalgamations and sharing of back office functions, such as HR and IT.

There is a unique opportunity to seize-upon the merger of the former Children and Community and Social Services ministries into MCCSS by eliminating repetitive eligibility tests and streamlining the age-based direct funding programmes Special Services at Home (SSAH) and Passport into one programme. These reforms would help address the “cliff” families fear when their children turn 18.

These ideas are meant simply as a starting point for discussion. Given the opportunity to participate in substantive consultation, we are prepared to work together to develop these and other ideas further.

Consultation is a must with the individuals, families and service providers directly impacted by publicly-funded developmental services. No one understands the challenges and opportunities of our sector better than those who provide and receive supports.

2. Maintain funding allocations at current levels

While we are not asking for new money as part of this Budget submission, OASIS is calling on the government to maintain agency budgets at current levels by annualizing stabilization funding. After over a decade of frozen budgets, the DS sector received \$57 million in new funding in Budget 2018 to help address increases in both need and basic operating costs, such as hydro bills, food, and property. This stabilization funding accounts for 0.35% of the overall budget of MCCSS in 2019. Stabilization funding is vital to all DS agencies budgets and helps keep people out of crisis, as well as out of hospitals and correctional facilities.

Cuts to this funding would mean job losses, with some agencies needing to permanently close their doors, leading to even longer wait lists for services. It would lead to people and their families losing the services they count on, which means more parents and caregivers working part-time or not at all to support their family members with developmental disabilities. Cuts to these direct services put individuals and families at imminent risk and

tax the whole system greatly, not only those individuals directly impacted. It would mean higher costs to other government sectors, including our already strained health system, due to some of Ontario's most vulnerable people with complex care needs being placed in hospital beds, for want of more appropriate settings. OASIS is committed to working with government to modernize the sector and improve the services to individuals and families. Learning from other jurisdictions, modernization must be funded properly to avoid disruption to critical services. At a minimum this must start with a commitment to maintaining current budget allocations, including the critical stabilization funding.

3. Maintain the Passport Bridge

Currently, some individuals with developmental disabilities receive direct funding when they turn 18 through the Passport programme. They use these funds to purchase services in their communities, such as employment training opportunities, cooking classes to increase independence, and public transit training to help people navigate their communities. This is real money in people's pockets that they can direct however they see fit.

The waitlist for Passport funding is over five years, and often does not become available until well after youth-focused SSAH funding expires. In Budget 2018, the Passport Bridge was introduced, which provides \$5000 per year to families on the waitlist while they wait for their full allocation to become available. Families who have received this funding have reported significantly improved access to community services and quality of life.

To date, the government has not communicated regarding the future of Passport generally or the Passport Bridge in particular. Many individuals and their families are unable to make critical decisions about services in the community without assurances about their eligibility. Many families who should be eligible for the Passport Bridge have not received word about their future. Absent clear information, many are assuming the worst and expecting cuts to Passport. Removing this programme would mean pulling money out of family budgets and real cuts to the services these families purchase. OASIS is calling on the government to publicly commit to maintaining both Passport and the Passport Bridge and communicate a timeline around full implementation of the \$5000 allocations for families on the waitlist.

Conclusion

The key areas outlined here should in no way be seen as encompassing all of our sector's priorities. For example, there is a desperate need for more and adequate housing for people with developmental disabilities, a need that will only continue to grow as family caregivers age. We look forward to participating in forthcoming engagement opportunities on this critical topic.

Despite these other pressing issues, OASIS is advocating for the inclusion of the key areas articulated above in Budget 2020.

To reiterate, OASIS is advocating for:

1. Commitment to stabilize the sector by maintaining funding;
2. Substantive consultation around transformation and modernization, and;
3. Continued support for the Passport programme

Working together, we can provide better and more efficient services while protecting the vulnerable people we serve.