



Pre-Budget Submission:
Protecting Sustainable Support for Adults Living with Developmental Disabilities

January 2022



Building on the progress made during the COVID-19 pandemic

- Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) and its 190+ member agencies support 65,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities across Ontario, employing 25,000 full and part-time staff.
- The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the developmental services (DS) sector and our member agencies dramatically. Normal routines were disrupted, in-person relationships shifted to virtual, and traditional services and supports changed almost overnight.
- The Ontario Government has been a vital ally on this difficult journey. OASIS appreciates the important investments made by the province to support the DS sector during the pandemic emergency.
- Moreover, the ongoing pandemic demonstrated the critical importance of safe, high-quality care for people living with developmental disabilities, who are among Ontario's most vulnerable.
- Developmental services workers (DSWs) perform challenging and specialized work that keeps these individuals healthy and safe while providing enriching programs and vital services. They are deeply trusted by the individuals and families that they support on a daily basis.
- OASIS supports the government's ambitious vision for the future of the developmental services sector outlined in *Journey to Belonging*, and the shared path towards a sustainable, needs-based and person-directed system driven by evidence.
- As vulnerable individuals living with developmental disabilities and their families are transitioning back to in-person service delivery, there is an important opportunity to build on the progress made over the past two years towards a long-term, sustainable path for Ontario's developmental services sector.

Making the \$3/hour wage enhancement permanent is an urgent and immediate priority

- As a necessary first step, **OASIS strongly recommends that the \$3 per hour wage enhancement for DSWs be made permanent.**
- The wage enhancement has directly led to higher quality care for individuals living with developmental disabilities, and will continue to have a substantial impact on stabilizing the sector during these uncertain times.
- A permanent wage enhancement is vital to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities continue to receive the excellent services they need, and that our staff are respected with fair compensation for the essential work they do.



- The DS sector is confronting a significant skills and labour shortage, and the permanent wage enhancement 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*.
- It is a foundational step to achieving a more flexible, individualized and responsive developmental service sector now and into the future.

Housing: Building a Foundation for Successful, Long-Term Sector Reform

- There is a great need for more and adequate housing for people with developmental disabilities, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- OASIS supports the recommendation, as introduced by our member agencies Community Living Toronto and Reena, for the Ontario Government to commit 10% of the next phase (beginning in April 2022) of National Housing Strategy funding to a prioritized investment in housing for individuals living with developmental disabilities.
- Local municipalities and developmental services agencies can work together to determine how these funds are used locally to address housing needs for adults living with developmental disabilities.

Working Together to Improve the Lives of Individuals with Special Needs

- Throughout the pandemic, we have reimagined how individuals are supported, how services and staffing are structured and how the sector works with the health care system and other government partners.
- Together, OASIS and the Ontario Government recognize that DSWs are critical workers, who every day do dangerous and difficult work that helps ensure the health and safety of some of the most vulnerable in our society.
- Making the \$3/hour wage enhancement permanent is a critical foundation upon which we can collectively realize our shared vision of providing more responsive and individually-directed services and care to those we support.



Additional Context: COVID-19 and the Future of the Developmental Services Sector

Building on the progress made during the COVID-19 pandemic

Navigating the unprecedented impact of the pandemic and changes across the entire developmental services sector could not have been done successfully without the critical steps taken by the Ontario Government to support the urgent needs of our sector and those we care for.

These critical initiatives have had a profoundly positive effect on the sector moving forward and are already moving us towards the goals set out in *Journey to Belonging*. They include:

- Including DSWs in the \$3/hour wage enhancement, recognizing the vital frontline care and support they provide to many of Ontario's most vulnerable adults;
- The flexibility introduced through emergency orders, including how agency budgets and Passport funds can be spent;
- The fast tracking of technology, as a valuable tool for supports and services, providing many long overdue opportunities and efficiencies for the sector and the individuals we serve;
- Continue to build on the multi-ministry engagement among the DS sector and government in response to the pandemic, recognizing that the individuals we support have complex and interconnected housing, health, and education needs; and
- Priority access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other health & safety materials and technology, with a further pledge of \$8.9 million more outlined in the recent Fall Economic Statement for such COVID-19 supports in congregate care settings.

While the impacts of COVID-19 are still being felt, and will continue for some time, OASIS is motivated to work towards a better future. The opportunity is now to enshrine these pandemic measures into permanent policies, and thereby provide a solid and stable foundation upon which to build a sustainable developmental services sector focused on delivering the type of care and support that each individual and family requires.



Understanding the critical impact of a permanent wage enhancement

The wage enhancement for DSWs has directly led to higher quality care for individuals living with developmental disabilities, and peace of mind for their families during this unprecedented time.

OASIS firmly believes that this enhancement has had, and will continue to have, a substantial positive impact on helping to stabilize the sector during these challenging times.

- We have seen the devastating impacts that precarious work can bring, and we need these supports to ensure our DSWs do not have to take several jobs to make ends meet.
- Moreover, failing to include DSWs within the permanent wage enhancement will seriously undermine the success of the Ontario Government's plan for a measured, principles-based DS sector reform, as laid out in the *Journey to Belonging* vision document earlier this year.
- Without it, the developmental services sector will be unable to attract and retain the creative, compassionate and highly capable frontline staff that will be crucial to realizing the more responsive and individualized approach to developmental services supports that both the Ontario Government and OASIS are committed to achieving.
- The DS sector is pursuing all opportunities to attract and train new workers, including refugees and TFWs, but ensuring fair compensation for these frontline staff is crucial.
- The wage enhancement for DSWs will also play a role in helping Ontario's economy emerge stronger as we come out the other side of the COVID-19 pandemic. The enhancement has brought a better sense of stability amongst DSWs, as well as increased consumer spending, making a direct contribution to recovering local economies.
- Further, maintaining this wage enhancement on a permanent basis is vital to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities continue to receive the excellent services they need, and that our staff are respected with fair compensation for the essential work they do.