

Dear (MPP),

As a constituent in the (RIDING) riding, I am writing today to express my concerns with respect to the New Ontario Autism Program (OAP).

As you are aware, there are 8,400 children with autism currently receiving support from the OAP while 23,000 children remain on the waitlist for life changing evidence-based therapy. Therapy for a child on the spectrum is their education as well as a medical necessity. It allows a child to connect with the world and prepare them for school. Therapy that is based on individual needs helps children to thrive and reach their potential. Without it, they are at increased risk of requiring costly support as adults.

Changes to the OAP include a max yearly payout that would never meet the cost of intensive ABA therapy. It is a capped funding model that discriminates against age, Francophones and Northern Ontario families. The proposed funding model means that the majority of children will not have access to the clinically prescribed amount of evidence-based therapy that they need to thrive because they will be limited by their age and what their families can afford.

This is unacceptable, as equality does not mean equity, and no two children with autism are alike. For this reason, please allow me to share with you my family's story.

(STORY)

My story is not dissimilar from many other families' located across the province. I therefore encourage you to visit wearethe100percent.ca to familiarize yourself with some of the families who are impacted by the changes to the OAP.

And while I acknowledge the Conservative Government's commitment to reducing the waitlist and the recent implementation of enhancements to the program, the new OAP fails to meet the needs of children on the spectrum and puts significant financial and emotional stress on families. I strongly urge the government to use the next few months as an opportunity to engage in thorough, transparent and meaningful consultations with autism experts such as the ONTABA, families of children with autism and people with autism from across the province including northern, rural and francophone communities.

This government has the opportunity to make changes to the program, but we need equity not equality. The program requires further enhancements that take into consideration the following recommendations:

- Removal of age discrimination within the funding structure.
- Implementation of a funding model that is needs based.
- Additional government investments to increase the number of qualified specialists (ABA therapists, BCBA's and psychologists) across the province, including rural, northern and francophone regions. The reality is that service providers do not currently have the capacity to support approximately 31,000 children. And many rural families will need to spend significant portions of their budget for travel.
- Mandating the availability of French Language Services.

- Providing appropriate supports in schools.

I thank you in advance for your consideration of the issues identified with the New Ontario Autism Program and for your commitment to improving the program.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any additional information.

(NAME)

(EMAIL)

#WeAreThe100Percent

#ScrapTheAgeCap