

Supporting a Safe and Healthy Response to the Second Wave / Building Strength for the Future

*Community Living Ontario 2020
Pre-Budget Recommendations
October 2020*



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionately negative impact on people who have an intellectual disability, their families, and the organizations that support them. For example:

- ◇ People living independently in the community have lost access to crucial supports due to service changes in response to the pandemic.
- ◇ People in congregate settings have been in lockdown for more than six months. The ability to see family and friends (including essential caregivers) and access services is unpredictable, varies substantially between organizations, and is a heavy influence on mental health.
- ◇ Family caregivers have lost access to services and supports, including respite, with worrying impacts on health and the ability to work.
- ◇ People who have an intellectual disability have lost work and continue to face a decline in employment income.
- ◇ Families who manage their own supports (including those funded by SSAH and Passport) have been forced to limit or end in-home and out-of-home supports because of risks to themselves, the person directly supported and elderly/medically compromised family members.

Across the province, people who have an intellectual disability, their families and service agencies have stepped up to the challenge of COVID-19. The provincial government has taken important steps to lend a hand, including the implementation of Pandemic Pay, changes to Passport funding, the COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund (CRRF), the recently-announced [temporary wage enhancement](#), and emergency orders that provided developmental service (DS) agencies with needed staffing flexibility. Despite this, Ontario's DS sector faces a precarious near-future:

- ◇ The substantial and long-standing compensation advantage of health care and long-term care (LTC) is a major barrier to hiring and retaining qualified staff in developmental services. Recently-announced [incentives](#) for new workers in LTC and Home and Community Care will further draw Personal Support Workers (PSWs) and Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) away from the DS sector.
- ◇ Recently-announced [investments](#) supporting the recruitment and hiring of staff in the LTC and health care sectors unfortunately do not extend to developmental service agencies.
- ◇ The physical and mental health of people living in congregate settings depends on renewed access to family and other essential visitors. However, increasing rates of burnout, turnover and staff shortages are making it very difficult to safely open up DS congregated settings to outside caregivers and visitors.
- ◇ Congregated day services for people who have an intellectual disability remain closed across the province due to pandemic-related safety concerns. The consequent lack of availability of respite services and other day supports is having an overwhelmingly negative effect on people and their families.



On top of these issues, the waiting list for access to developmental services continues to grow. More than 15,000 people are eligible for but not receiving services and supports that would drastically improve their health, well-being, and quality of life.

This brief lays out concrete steps the provincial government can take to address these short-term issues, support the health of people who utilize the services of DS agencies, and set a path for the future that will allow more people who have an intellectual disability to get the services and supports they need to achieve a better quality of life.

A. Support people and families to meet crucial personal and educational needs during the pandemic

1. Increase minimum annual Passport funding to \$6,000 per eligible person, with matching increases to available funds for people assessed at all need levels. Make the recent [expansion](#) of Passport eligibility permanent.
2. Create an Emergency Respite Fund, delivered through Special Services at Home and Passport, to support people and families in crisis situations who are unable to access agency-provided respite. This fund would support the hiring of a wider range of safe and trusted individuals or organizations to provide short-term breaks for both people who have an intellectual disability and their supporters and caregivers.
3. For students with Individualized Education Plans who have opted for virtual learning in the 2020-2021 school year, invest in the purchase and safe home-based delivery of IEP-identified supports that they would otherwise receive in the classroom (e.g., itinerant occupational, physical and speech and language therapies).

B. Take real steps to reduce unacceptable levels of poverty among people who have an intellectual disability

1. Reinstatement of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Emergency Benefit and ensure that the benefit is automatically included with regular ODSP payments. Extend payments to March 2021, with retroactivity to April 2020 for those who have not yet received it.
2. In the long term, increase ODSP benefits to, at minimum, levels equal to the new Canada Recovery Benefit. This will provide incomes that approach the Market Basket Measure of poverty for many households.
3. Amend ODSP regulations to (a) remove the \$10,000 limit on voluntary gifts and payments, and (b) increase asset limits to \$100,000 for single-person households, and \$200,000 for households with a spouse in the benefit unit.

C. Stabilize and support the developmental services sector to better meet the needs of people who have an intellectual disability

1. Implement a permanent investment to support a minimum hourly wage floor across the developmental services (DS) sector, including for workers hired with Passport, Special Services at Home and Individualized Funding.
2. Extend the recently-announced [Personal Support Worker Return of Service Program](#) to the DS sector, and increase the maximum number of supported graduates to 2,500. Further, invest \$10 million annually over the next three years in Developmental Service Worker training incentives.



3. Evolve fiscal DS sector stabilization funds into annualized permanent and predictable base funding. This will support agencies to effectively implement needed reforms while continuing to provide high levels of care and support.
4. As the province invests in projects to jump-start the economy, prioritize investment in geographically distributed, market-based housing options (including rental and home ownership) for people who have an intellectual disability. This should include the use of rent supplements and portable housing allowances, as well as development requirements mandating universal design and a minimum proportion of affordable units for people who have intellectual disabilities within new builds.
5. Invest in forward-thinking mental health supports for people who have intellectual disabilities who are struggling with a loss of supports and connection spurred by pandemic-related changes and restrictions.
6. As part of a wider emphasis on service de-congregation, create a Day Services Innovation Fund to support developmental service agencies to permanently evolve away from congregated adult day programs in a way that responds to individualized support needs and leverages natural supports and community-based options.
7. Prioritize access to rapid COVID-19 tests so that people can gain increased access to their family and the broader community. Ensure the highest level of priority for flu vaccinations, as well as the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available, among residents and staff in congregated DS housing.

For each of these recommendations, it is crucial to ensure a focus on and participation of communities experiencing racialization and marginalization, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.

Conclusion

People who have an intellectual disability have seen their situations change drastically for the worse since the onset of the pandemic. While many Ontarians have experienced increased personal restrictions, unemployment and declining income security, these issues have been felt exponentially among people who have an intellectual disability. We cannot return to the approach taken in the spring and early summer – people’s long-term physical and mental health depend on it. We believe that the steps outlined above will rebalance services and supports in the short term, and set us on a positive path for the future.

About Community Living Ontario

Community Living Ontario is a family-based association assisting people who have an intellectual disability and their families to lead the way in advancing inclusion in their own lives and in their communities. As a province-wide confederation, rooted in a strong network of individuals, families, friends, member organizations and community partners, it will be guided by, adhere to and strive to achieve its goal and vision in all its actions.

