

Building Support, Engagement, and Collaboration to Better Support People Who Have Developmental Disabilities

Community Living Ontario
Pre-Budget Submission
February 2021



Summary of Recommendations

People who have a developmental disability, their families, and service agencies have stepped up to the challenge of COVID-19 in remarkable ways. The provincial government has taken important steps to lend a hand, including wage enhancements, changes to Passport and Special Services at Home funding, the COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund (CRRF), and \$361 million in additional funding for the developmental services (DS) sector.

People, families, and service organizations will require expanded supports over the next fifteen months, as we face new challenges including more contagious variants of COVID-19. Community Living Ontario is recommending the following:

1. Continue the \$3 per hour wage enhancement for workers in developmental services.
2. Develop and implement a robust mental health strategy for people who have developmental disabilities, their families, and support workers.
3. Commit 10% of National Housing Strategy investments to housing options that increase choice, independence, and quality of life for people who have developmental disabilities.
4. Enhance the Ontario Disability Support Program to enable dignity, health, and wellness.
5. Engage with the full range of developmental service stakeholders to effectively allocate \$361 million in new funding, and to reform the DS system.

Recommendations in Detail

1. Continue the \$3 per hour wage enhancement for workers in developmental services

Developmental service agencies across the province have consistently struggled to hire and retain staff. The supply of Personal Support Workers and Developmental Service Workers is constrained by fears about contagion, family pressures, and the lure of higher wages in the health and long-term care sectors. This struggle, which is also shared by those who hire support workers directly, has direct consequences for the people supported by our sector.

Making the temporary wage enhancement permanent will go a long way in creating a living wage for people who choose to work in developmental services, and lead to a reliable, high-quality workforce supporting people who have developmental disabilities. While other steps are necessary – for example, addressing the substantial wage disparities within the sector, and relative to other sectors – this is a crucial action that will reduce pressure on the system.

2. Develop and implement a robust mental health strategy for people who have developmental disabilities, their families, and support workers

Nearly half of people who have developmental disabilities will be [diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder](#). People with developmental disabilities have very high rates of repeat emergency department visits and re-hospitalization. Almost half of hospital admissions among the population are connected to struggles



with mental health. Too often, mental health resources are not tailored to the needs of people who have developmental disabilities, or to the needs of family members and other supporters.

People with disabilities who live in congregated settings, such as group homes, have faced more stringent lockdown conditions than the general population during the pandemic. This has exacerbated the isolation, anxiety, and depression that was already far too common. It has increased work-related pressures for support staff. It has also led to frustration, guilt and anxiety among family members who have been separated from their children and siblings.

Given these challenges, the developmental services sector needs a unified mental health strategy that incorporates both primary health care and specialist mental health expertise and resources.

3. Commit 10% of National Housing Strategy investments to housing options that increase choice, independence, and quality of life for people who have developmental disabilities

Ontario has made laudable advances in human rights-based housing approaches for people who have developmental disabilities. The province's system of residential supports has evolved far beyond the outmoded institutional practices of the past. That being said, there is still more to do. Thousands of people – many living with aging parents who are increasingly unable to provide support and care – are on the waiting list for supportive housing.

There is a growing consensus in the DS sector that we need a dedicated commitment of 10% of National Housing Strategy funds to chip away at the waiting list for supportive housing. This will lead to improved physical and mental health among aging parents, and will create needed stability for people directly supported by developmental services. This funding must be used to create geographically distributed, semi-independent, affordable housing opportunities, including diverse rental options (supported by municipal rent supplements and portable provincial housing allowances) and home ownership.

4. Enhance the Ontario Disability Support Program to enable dignity, health, and wellness

People who have developmental disabilities face stereotypes, misperceptions, and discrimination at every turn. Too often, their strengths and contributions are ignored, and many opportunities are closed off to them. Unfortunately, the majority are forced to rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to make ends meet.

It is impossible to properly maintain one's health and well-being on the \$15,118 per year provided to people who are on ODSP (which is about \$3,500 below the poverty line). The housing options available at this level force thousands of people into situations that drastically limit their choice and independence. There are deep inequities between people who are able to access Developmental Services Ontario funding, and those who must rely only on ODSP.

Community Living Ontario strongly recommends the following changes to ODSP:

- ◇ Increase ODSP benefits to, at minimum, levels equal to the Canada Recovery Benefit. This will provide incomes that approach the Market Basket Measure of poverty for many households.



- ◇ Index ODSP benefits to inflation.
- ◇ 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.

5. Engage with the full range of developmental service stakeholders to effectively allocate \$361 million in new funding, and to reform the DS system

Community Living Ontario welcomed the provincial government's recently-announced infusion of \$361 million into the developmental service sector. We are also pleased to be actively engaged in ongoing consultations and discussions about the future of the sector. Both of these initiatives speak to the crucial importance of developmental services in Ontario.

We concur with OASIS (Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs) that there is a lack of clarity with respect to the additional funds announced in the Fall budget. It is imperative that MCCSS engage with the DS sector, families and people supported to ensure that these funds are allocated to have maximum impact.

Similarly, the planned reform of developmental services will only succeed with the leadership and deep participation of people who have developmental disabilities, their families, and DS agencies. It is essential that all stakeholders are engaged to create a better system, building on lessons learned from other jurisdictions, and from Ontario's specific history.

Seeing the Big Picture

In 2014, the [Select Committee on Developmental Services](#) (with Hon. Laura Albanese as Chair and Hon. Christine Elliot as Vice-Chair) recommended that "the provision of developmental services and support should be mandated and waitlists eliminated." The Ontario Ombudsman's 2016 [Nowhere to Turn](#) report, and the Auditor General's 2020 [report on developmental services](#) show just how far we have to go for this recommendation to be realized. The Auditor General showed that, in 2019-20:

- ◇ 63,500 adults with developmental disabilities had applied for and were considered eligible for supportive services;
- ◇ 34,159 people were waiting for at least one agency service;
- ◇ 20,480 of those waiting were receiving no services at all;
- ◇ Just 11,400 people were receiving all of the eligible services they had requested.

These figures point to the insistent need for prioritization of service for people who have developmental disabilities. We believe that the above recommendations, which are centred in the experience and knowledge of people with disabilities and their families, will lead to real and positive change among a population that is desperately in need of increased support.

Founded in 1953, Community Living Ontario is a non-profit provincial organization that advocates for people who have an intellectual disability to be fully included in all aspects of community life.

