

Community Living Ontario Policy Snapshot

Community Living Ontario's Recommendations for Direct Funding for People who have Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

I

In its recently-released developmental services reform plan, *Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion*, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services highlighted individualized and direct funding as a major focus of its planned reforms:

"We want to give people greater choice and flexibility to better meet their needs. This means introducing different ways people can get supports. People could continue receiving supports from service providers or choose to manage their funding directly. It could also mean a combination of both."

Many stakeholders in Ontario have advocated for direct funding – where people manage and pay for their own supports rather than choosing options offered by a service agency – for several decades, and Community Living Ontario supports this policy direction.

The MCCSS plan speaks to the potential influence of direct funding on service quality in the province:

"Moving towards a funding approach that gives people greater choice and control over their supports will play an important role in promoting service quality. Individualized funding can encourage service providers to innovate and provide high quality services that deliver the best possible outcomes for people."

The provincial government's plan seems to envision a system where people can control their funding rather than being matched with a limited number of service agencies, and where agencies will improve their services in order to compete for market share:

"Our plan will... help people better understand and choose quality services through a transparent quality framework [and] promote healthy competition among providers and reward innovators."

CLO supports the growth of direct funding because it has been shown to increase flexibility, control, and quality of life for people and families who choose this option. It also tends to decrease per-person costs of government-funded supports, since people using direct funding are more likely to build natural supports in the community and need less paid support. However, we believe that more work is required to understand how the change may affect overall service quality.

In Canadian provinces where direct funding is already available, uptake tends to be relatively low. The direct funding option has been chosen by about six percent of people supported in

British Columbia,¹ 10% in Alberta,² and up to 20% in Manitoba.³ In the United States, 12% of people with developmental disabilities supported across forty-two states access some level of direct funding.⁴ In the United Kingdom, where there has been a national push toward personalized budgets and direct funding, this rises to a quarter of all people with disabilities, seniors and people with mental health issues. Growth in the UK has been spurred by the wide availability of services to assist people and families to take on the responsibilities involved in hiring their own support staff.⁵

Research from direct funding pilots in [Saskatchewan](#) has shown that, while managing direct funding can be challenging, people and families consistently report that it is worth it. However, significant growth in direct funding will only occur if there are clear and consistent resources to support people and families in taking on the increased responsibilities of this approach.

Our recent report, [Building a Full Life + A Home of One's Own in the Community](#), puts forward a number of recommendations for direct funding in Ontario, including the following:

- Offer a direct funding option to all adults who are eligible for developmental service funding through the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, regardless of the level of assessed need for services and supports.
- Building on lessons learned from the Passport program, implement a direct funding infrastructure wherein:

- o Funded services and supports will include all items available via block-funded agency agreements and the existing Passport program. The cost of services and supports set out in individualized plans must be equal to or lower than those provided via block-funded agency agreements.

- o Plan managers (e.g., people themselves, family members or close personal friends, or transfer payment agencies) will be approved using clear and transparent guidelines, and will develop and submit annual individualized plans with clear goals and outcomes. Plans must address:

- i. A detailed outline of services and supports that will be purchased from agencies and/or individuals (including planning supports),

- ii. Additional out-of-pocket funds to be contributed by people and family members (note that these should not lead to reductions in program funds), and

- iii. The role of in-kind and unpaid supports from personal support networks (often referred to as 'natural supports').

It is highly recommended that more intensive plans (e.g., above \$50,000) require

1 CLBC 2018/19 annual service plan [report](#).

2 Persons with Developmental Disabilities program review – [Discussion guide](#).

3 Provincial Government data provided by Innovative Life Options.

4 National Core Indicators [2019](#).

5 Gladsby & Littlechild (2016). [Direct payments and personal budgets](#).

the engagement of facilitation and management support.

o Advance funding will be made available on a quarterly basis, with a requirement for regular financial reporting to the funding/oversight agency.

o Safeguarding people, fiscal responsibility and reporting will be key areas of focus, particularly in the planning and approval stages, with annual meetings required between plan managers, people accessing supports, and funding/oversight agency representatives.

- Following the precedent set by the Passport program, allow people who have developmental disabilities to choose supporters to assist them with making service decisions and managing funds, without recourse to guardianship.
- To support fairness across employment situations, minimum rates for the payment of Personal Support Workers and other staff will need to be established. Funding levels must account for inflation, coverage of group health benefits, liability insurance and membership in relevant professional bodies.

A number of people and families in Ontario have had access to direct funding for many years, and the Ministry's proposed changes will increase equity in the system. With an election fast approaching, we hope that all parties will commit to following through on the proposals outlined in Journey to Belonging. This is a tried and true approach that has been road-tested around the world, and it is overdue in our province.

For a detailed look at direct funding in other jurisdictions, the positive influence of this approach on quality of life, and our complete recommendations, please access the full [Building a Full Life](#) report.

Shawn Pegg

Director of Social Policy & Strategic Initiatives

shawn@communitylivingontario.ca

Community Living Ontario is a non-profit organization that advocates alongside people who have an intellectual disability, their families and agencies that support them across the province.

July 2021