

Community Living Ontario

2025 pre-budget recommendations



DECEMBER
2024

Executive Summary

Community Living Ontario is pleased to provide our pre-budget submission to Ontario's Ministry of Finance.

Community Living Ontario is a non-profit provincial association that has been advocating with people who have developmental disabilities and their families for 70 years. We proudly work alongside people, family networks, and more than 120 local agencies operating in communities across the province, to ensure that people's personal, health, and social support needs are met.

This submission is focused on the needs of people who have a developmental disability, their families, and developmental service organizations, and our recommendations have wide support across the developmental services sector. It is part of the #WaitingToBelong campaign, a collective effort to address the fact that more than 50,000 people (many of whom live in deep poverty) are waiting for developmental services in Ontario.

Over three decades, developmental service organizations have received cumulative base funding increases of less than 7% (including approximately 3% in the 2024 provincial budget), though the cost of living has increased by almost 70%. While the increase included in last year's budget was enthusiastically welcomed, the system requires sustainable annual base funding increases to stem the tide of staff attrition, service cuts, and program closures that are contributing to growing waitlists and negative health outcomes among people with developmental disabilities and their families.

At the household level, people with developmental disabilities and their families have been overwhelmed by the skyrocketing cost of living, and particularly with costs related to housing and hiring support staff. They are losing ground in the competition for qualified staff, and too often losing out as workers move into the education, health care, and long-term care sectors.

These are critical issues. Every day, people and their support networks are falling into crisis because of a lack of financial and social resources, and because they are unable to access needed services and supports. In light of these issues, Community Living Ontario is making the following recommendations for the 2025 provincial budget:

1. Commit to sustainable annual increases to developmental service agency base funding.
2. Provide full Passport allocations to all people eligible for the program.
3. Following recent increases to the ODSP basic needs and shelter amounts, tie all ODSP benefits, including the Personal Needs Allowance and Special Diet Allowance, to inflation.
4. Commit to zero clawbacks of the Canada Disability Benefit from people receiving ODSP.

These recommendations will bolster the precarious economic health of people and families, and contribute to sustaining a crucial sector that is currently under incredible stress. They will also work to reduce downstream costs in our health care, long term care, emergency services, and justice sectors.

The case for investing in people who have a developmental disability

People who have developmental disabilities in Ontario are at very high risk of negative health outcomes. While some recent investments have been made to improve support and care, we are still far from fully addressing the serious issues that people, families, and organizations are facing on a daily basis.

A few key indicators offer a stark picture of the current situation. Adults who have a developmental disability:

- Account for between 12% and 34% of people experiencing homelessness, despite making up less than 2% of the population.¹
- Have been disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis, with a higher risk of opioid use disorder and overdose.²
- Are more likely to experience repeat emergency department visits.
- Are more likely to be readmitted to hospital within 30 days of an initial discharge.
- Are at higher risk of becoming ‘alternate level of care’ (ALC) patients while in hospital.
- Are more likely to live in a long-term care facility – incredibly, one in every ten adults aged 50-65 with a developmental disability in Ontario resides in a long-term care facility.³
- Are over-represented in Ontario’s correctional institutions, where the prevalence of developmental disability is three times the rate in the general population.⁴
- Experience much more frequent admissions to forensic psychiatric facilities, stay there longer, and tend to get stuck there even when they are ready for discharge.⁵

While Ontario has made great strides in supporting people with developmental disabilities to achieve good health and quality of life, these facts make it painfully clear that, on the whole, they continue to be among our most marginalized and vulnerable citizens. This presents an unacceptable burden for people themselves, and creates significant avoidable costs for Ontario’s health and social service systems.

Developmental service waitlists are growing, with no relief in sight

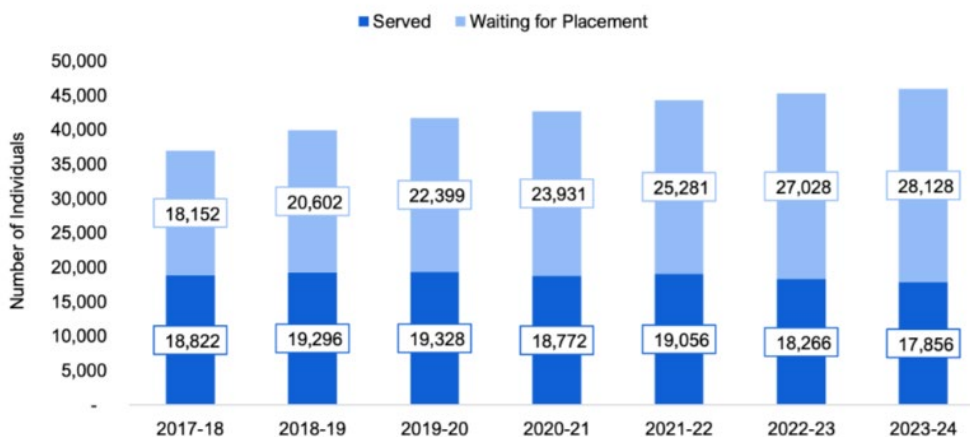
It is widely recognized that people with developmental disabilities face pervasive economic and social barriers, and deserve public funding to address and overcome those barriers.

To this end, nearly ten years ago the cross-party Select Committee on Developmental Services jointly recommended that “the provision of developmental services and support should be mandated and waitlists eliminated,” and that “the elimination of existing waitlists must be the top priority for government.”⁶

Unfortunately, we are far from achieving this recommendation. While there are more than 100,000 people who have a developmental disability in Ontario, less than 18,000 were receiving provincially-funded “supportive living services” (in other words, residential placements) in 2023-2024. In that same year there were more than 28,000 people who were eligible for and waiting to access supportive living services, as shown in the chart below (provided by the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario).⁷

Figure 6.3

Eligible individuals served and on waitlists for Developmental Services Supportive Living, by fiscal year



Note: 2023-24 values are interim as of December 2023. The number of people waiting for placement represents clients who have had their needs assessment and does not include those who are seeking placement but are still unassessed. In addition, the values for waiting for placement may include individuals already in a placement who are waiting for a different placement.
Source: FAO analysis of information provided by MCCSS

Shockingly, more people are waiting for these services than actually receiving them. In 2018-2019, the number of people waiting for supportive living services surpassed the number receiving those services, and that gap has only continued to grow. Additionally, there are thousands of people waiting to access programs and other supports that would allow them to safely participate and engage in their communities. Further, thousands of families are waiting to access caregiver respite funding that would enhance and extend their ability to provide care and support over the long term.

In other words, despite the recommendations of the Select Committee on Developmental Services, we are moving backwards.

The waitlist issue has broadly negative consequences for people and families, and for Ontario’s health and social services systems. For example:

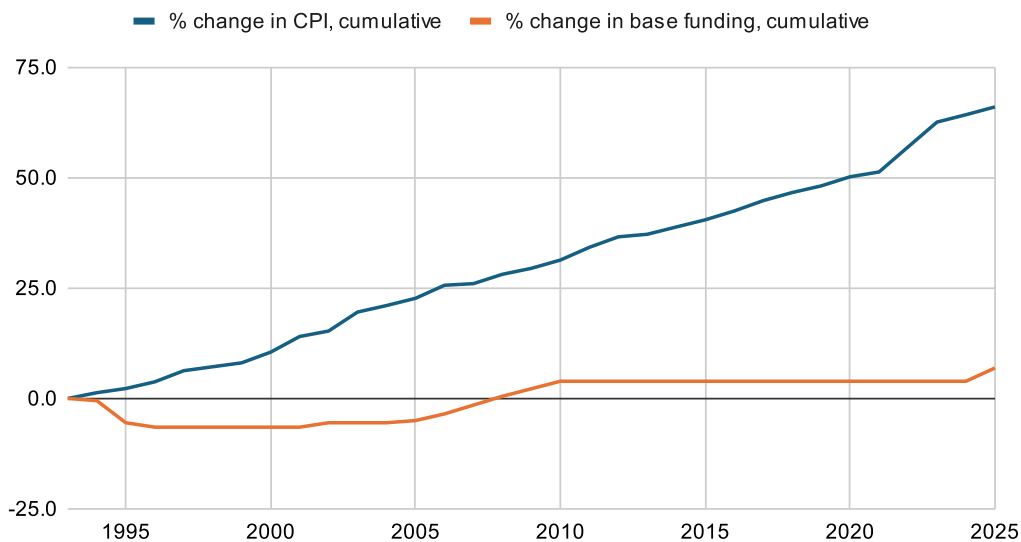
- As a result of the lack of more appropriate housing and support, approximately 2,500 people with developmental disabilities (65% of whom are under age 65) are languishing in long-term care facilities.⁸
- In the Greater Toronto Area, one in five emergency shelter users have an intellectual disability.⁹

Increasing investments in developmental services will reduce the use of these last-resort housing options, and will increase health and quality of life for people who are highly vulnerable to the negative effects of housing precarity.

There is an Urgent Need to Fill Growing Gaps in Access to Support

A key driver of the problems outlined above is the fact that developmental service organizations have seen cumulative base funding increases of less than 7% over the course of the past thirty years. During the same period, the cost of living has increased by almost 70%, as shown in the chart below. While the 3% base funding increase for developmental services in the 2024 provincial budget was enthusiastically welcomed, substantially more investment is needed.

Cumulative change in CPI and developmental services base funding



Sustainable levels of base funding would empower organizations to adequately cover the rising costs of staffing, food, fuel, transportation, heating and cooling, maintenance and repair of capital assets, and other necessary expenses. The ability to manage and cover these costs has direct and indirect effects on the quality of life of people accessing support and care.

Over the past decade, most agencies have restructured and reduced management and administrative positions, and have restructured their direct care workforce to reduce costs. They have lowered operating costs in every way imaginable, including taking vehicles off the road, cancelling outside contracts, cutting service coordination, and closing administrative offices. They have cut all they can and are now at a breaking point. A growing number have taken the extreme step of reducing residential spaces and thus the number of people they are able to support.

In reviewing the specific history of base funding in developmental services (which includes a 6.5% budget cut imposed in the mid-1990s) we do not mean to ignore other investments made in the sector over the years. It must be noted that the Government of Ontario's 2013 apology for the harms inflicted on residents of the province's regional centres marked a period of increased spending. This resulted in more people being able to access needed services, and increased the amount of funding people and families were able to access via Passport, Special Services at Home, and other direct funding programs. Increases to wages (including the recent \$3 per hour increase for front-line workers) have helped agencies stay relatively competitive, though gaps with other sectors remain.

The irony of these investments is that developmental service organizations, including the collective membership of Community Living Ontario, have been pressed to support more people without the ability to expand crucial organizational infrastructure, or even to keep up with the normal costs of doing business. The sector has responded by cutting or reallocating expenses, and by increasing grant-based and non-government fundraising. However, it has been very difficult for a relatively small sector that supports people who are widely stereotyped and misunderstood, with organizations that are often believed to be government-run, to compete in a very tight fundraising environment.

People and families are struggling to make ends meet

It is well-established that people with disabilities face increased direct and indirect costs stemming from the barriers they face in gaining adequate incomes and meeting their health and medical needs. Likewise, parents of children and adults with disabilities must cover a range of out-of-pocket disability-related costs while often forgoing employment income.¹⁰

In Ontario, direct funding programs including Passport, Special Services at Home, Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities, and Enhanced Respite acknowledge and partially address these additional costs. While they are limited in the amount of funding they provide, these programs are valued across the board.

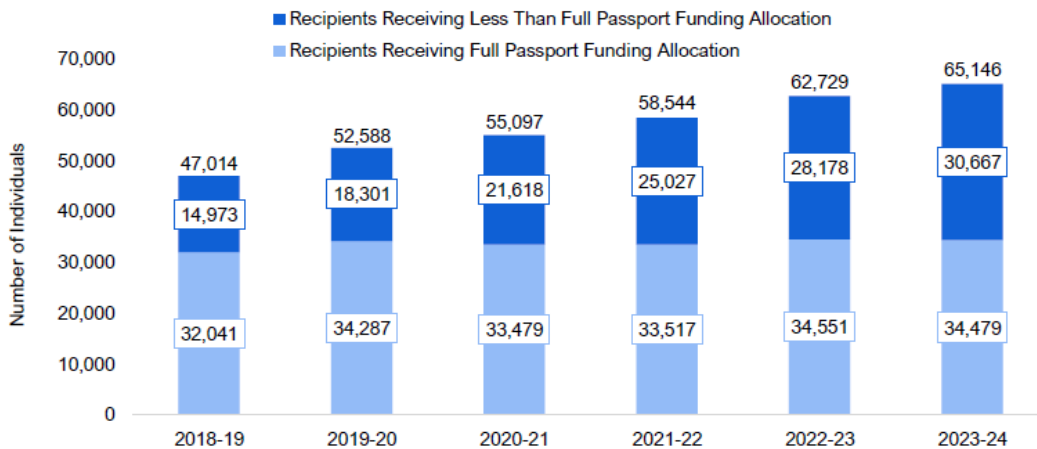
The Passport Program: Valuable and Overdue for Growth

The [Passport program](#) provides between \$5,500 and \$45,500 per year for adults who have been deemed eligible to access developmental services. People must purchase eligible items and submit for reimbursement from MCCSS. Given the substantial disability-related costs faced by people with developmental disabilities and their families, Passport is valued across the board.

Currently, everyone eligible for developmental services can access a minimum annual Passport allocation of \$5,500, and there is a waitlist to access the full allocation. The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario reported that, as of December 2023, 34,500 people were able access their full allocation, and 31,000 were receiving the \$5,500 minimum. The number of people waiting for their full allocation has grown by 105% since 2019, as shown in the chart below.

Figure 6.4

Number of people receiving Passport funding, by fiscal year



Note: 2023-24 values are interim as of December 2023.
Source: FAO analysis of information provided by MCCSS.

The Passport program is critical in helping young adults cope with the loss of access to children’s services at age 18; helping people and families hire staff to provide needed services; and supporting breaks for caregivers, among other things. The fact that people in very similar situations have differential access to this funding points to an insupportable unfairness and lack of equity in the developmental service system.

ODSP: Increases in the Short Term, Losing Value Over the Long Term

When compared with Ontario Works, higher Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates also acknowledge the added costs faced by people with disabilities. The Government of Ontario has increased ODSP rates by [16%](#) since September 2022, and increases to basic needs and shelter amounts have been tied to inflation moving forward. Further, the amount of employment-related income ODSP

recipients can earn before their benefits are reduced has also increased. Each of these steps has put more money into the pockets of Ontarians with disabilities.

Unfortunately, even with these increases, ODSP purchasing power has declined, and people can now afford to buy less than they could twenty years ago:

- In 2004, the ODSP rate for a single person with a disability was about 20% below Canada's official poverty line (i.e., the Market Basket Measure of poverty).
- Right now, the maximum ODSP rate for a single person with a disability is \$1,368 per month. This is about 40% below the official poverty line. In other words, the buying power of ODSP is worse than it was 20 years ago, even with recent increases.
- Other ODSP amounts, including the Special Diet Allowance and Personal Needs Allowance (for people who live in certain residential settings), have not and will not be tied to inflation.

One discouraging effect of this situation is the fact that nearly a third of Ontarians accessing food banks report ODSP as their primary source of income.¹¹ As conservative thought leader Sean Speer has noted, Canadians with disabilities experience poverty at twice the rate of non-disabled people, and are more than twice as likely to face household food insecurity.¹²

Speer has also highlighted the fact that Canada spends just 0.8% of its Gross Domestic Product on supports and services for people with disabilities, the fifth lowest amongst OECD countries. It is somewhat jarring to see an established conservative commentator borrowing language from the left when he writes (in the context of the Canada Disability Benefit) that we have chosen to “legislate poverty for persons with disabilities” – a critique that has often been made of ODSP.

A cost-effective solution to health and social care

Increasing investments in home- and community-based developmental services will represent a cost-saving measure over the long term. By boosting the ability of organizations and informal caregivers to support people who have a developmental disability, we will increase people's health and well-being, and reduce the likelihood that they will end up in shelters, long-term care facilities, and hospitals.

The developmental service sector – encompassing family members, informal support networks, and front-line agencies including the members of Community Living Ontario – is essential to support the needs of people who have a developmental disability. Our recommendations are directly informed by the experiences of people, families and organizations facing tough decisions about how to meet support needs and make ends meet in a very uncertain climate.

Every day, people and their support networks are falling into crisis because of (a) a lack of economic and social resources, and (b) they are unable to access needed services and supports. In light of these issues, Community Living Ontario is making the following recommendations for the 2025 provincial budget:

1. Commit to sustainable annual increases to developmental service agency base funding.
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4. Commit to zero clawbacks of the Canada Disability Benefit from people receiving ODSP.

If implemented, our recommendations will help to offset historical underfunding, increase the developmental service sector's ability to manage the ongoing human resource crisis, and provide additional stability and safety for people who have a developmental disability.

For more information, please contact:

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NOTES

¹ D. Lamanna et. al (2020). Supporting Efforts by Intellectually Disabled Adults to Exit Homelessness: Key Ingredients of a Cross-Sector Partnership. [Psychiatric Services](#).

² Q. Guan et. al (2022). New opioid use and risk of opioid-related adverse events among adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ontario, Canada. [BJPsych Open](#).

³ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2019). [Addressing gaps in the health care services used by adults with developmental disabilities in Ontario](#).

⁴ HCARDD. [Developmental Disabilities in Ontario's Provincial Correctional Facilities: Using Data to Tell the Story](#).

⁵ HCARDD. [Developmental Disabilities in Ontario's Criminal Justice and Forensic System: Using Data to Tell the Story](#).

⁶ Ontario Select Committee on Developmental Services (2014). [Inclusion and Opportunity: A New Path for Developmental Services in Ontario](#).

⁷ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2024). [MCCSS: Spending plan review](#).

65,000 people also receive between \$5,500 and \$45,500 per year via the Passport program, with an average allocation of about \$11,200.

⁸ Freedom of Information request, Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care, 2024.

⁹ M. Braithwaite (2024). [Road home: Struggle for safe home even greater for those with disability](#).

¹⁰ See, for example:

M. Stabile & S. Allin (2012). [The economic costs of childhood disability](#).

S. Mitra et. al (2017). [Extra costs of living with a disability: A review and agenda for research](#).

¹¹ Feed Ontario (2023). [Hunger Report 2023: Why Ontarians can't get ahead](#).

¹² S. Speer (2024). [In a world of scarce government resources, providing more support for disabled Canadians should be a top priority](#).