

NEWS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Autism Ontario's Response to the 2011 Ontario Budget**

March 29, 2011 (Toronto, ON) – For the first time in three years, “autism” receives a mention in the Ontario Budget. The budget references that the government plans to spend over \$186 million annually specifically to support children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder. These funds were previously announced. Autism Ontario is pleased to be the recipient of some of these funds, through the expansion of our Realize Community Potential Program across the province, to be able to serve over 1000 families with the March Break and Summer One-to-One Funds, and as a supporter of a number of the proposals for Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) supports submitted in response to the \$25 million in funding being distributed across Ontario. Even with the investment of over \$186 million annually, it is still not likely that we are going to see significant improvement in the currently unacceptable situations of service wait-lists.

Full-day learning for 4 and 5 year olds continues to be promoted vigorously in the Ontario Budget. There is still no transparent language included as to the creation or availability of additional supports for students with special needs to attend full day classes. The recent announcement of \$66 million over the next 3 years “to continue helping children and youth with complex special needs and their families by making services more accessible, better coordinated and more responsive” (pg. 50), combined with the commitment to implement a mental health and addictions strategy that is comprehensive provides hope because of the significant mental health needs of our population which are often not addressed at a young age.

Last year, we asked if the funding allocated to further improve transition rates from high school to postsecondary education would include supports to assist students with special needs who might be academically ready but socially unprepared for a post-secondary education. There is still no specificity regarding additional supports available to assist these students to become active participants in their school community. The 2011 budget document once again references the creation of an entity called the Ontario Online Institute (pg. 41). Once again, according to the budget document it “will bring the best professors from Ontario’s post-secondary institutions into the home of those who want to pursue higher learning.” This remains an encouraging development that will provide additional options for learning for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who might not be best suited to learning in a formal classroom setting. We hope this initiative is able to get off the ground in 2011.

Children with autism grow up to be adults with autism. The government needs to plan for adult supports now. The Social Inclusion Act was a positive step forward, but without additional investment for transitions from high school or for day supports and housing, waiting

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lists for adult services will continue to grow. Crisis responses to individual situations will remain costly and unsustainable.

Again this year, while there were no surprises in this budget, there also was not a great deal of detail. Although positive steps have been taken to treat, educate and support some individuals with ASD, with prevalence rate of 1 in 125 individuals diagnosed (applied to population rates in Ontario – it would mean over 80,000 people in Ontario with ASD), the current level of financial investment for our most vulnerable citizens remains unacceptable. Ontario must continue to increase funding and capacity to treat and support individuals with ASD in the early years, the school years and into adulthood - across the lifespan.

For more information or to view our public service announcements, visit our website at www.autismontario.com. Since 1973, Autism Ontario has been the voice for families of children and adults with ASD through Chapters in most communities across Ontario.

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