



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Autism Ontario Responds to Announcement Regarding Implementation of the Needs-Based Program

On December 17, MCCSS Minister Todd Smith, together with MPP Jeremy Roberts, announced the Government of Ontario's endorsement of key recommendations in the [OAP Advisory Panel Report](#) that was released on October 30, 2019. The announcement identified signs of positive movement forward while also including some disappointing news that the full program would not be available until 2021.

The endorsement of a needs-based program supported by four core services (applied behaviour analysis, occupational therapy, speech language pathology and mental health supports) is a first for Ontario. We are encouraged to hear that in addition to the core services, the announcement affirmed the implementation of an early intervention program, care coordination, foundational supports and urgent services. The emphasis in the panel's report on mental health supports and urgent response services were welcome additions as they also reflect the needs referenced in the [Ombudsman's report](#), "Nowhere to Turn."

After multiple changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) throughout the past several years, it is clear that families are anxious to have the transition to a needs-based approach occur as quickly as possible. For families who have been waiting for service for years, the announcement of a multi-phased approach is disheartening. While the implementation is taking longer than hoped, we are encouraged that an implementation panel has been identified and includes diverse representation. This group will benefit from its members who have experience with previous autism advisory committees and are being joined by strong professionals and advocates who will be able to tackle the difficult work of implementing this welcome change in policy direction. Autism Ontario is also pleased to see Ken Robertson

appointed; as an Autism Ontario Board member, caregiver and a strong advocate for Indigenous communities across Canada he has much to contribute. Along with northern representatives, he will help communicate some of the hardships and challenges that Indigenous, marginalized, rural and remote families experience due to a lack of access to culturally informed services in their communities.

We are relieved to hear that families who have never received supports or funding through the OAP will be given one-time funding throughout the next several months. This is an important step forward in supporting families as they wait for the full implementation of the OAP. Autism Ontario's Service Navigators will be working diligently to assist families who need support with filling out forms, understanding eligible and ineligible expenses, and making the most of this one-time funding.

Autism Ontario supports a plan for the Ontario Autism Program that is free of barriers or siloed approaches. This is most effective when it includes inter-ministerial support, with particular focus on the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. In order to provide comprehensive supports to children and youth on the spectrum, it is critically important that these ministries come to the table as partners in supporting autistic people and their families.

The efficacy and success of Ontario's autism programming must not fall solely on the shoulders of children's programming. We know that to support people on the spectrum, comprehensive supports into and throughout adulthood are needed. These proposed changes offer opportunities for children to build a strong foundation to successfully transition into adulthood. However, in absence of robust services and supports including the post-secondary, employment, mental health, and housing sectors, autistic adults will continue to struggle for support and our social safety net will continue to fail autistic adults and their families.



The anxiety families feel while waiting for the Ontario Autism Program to be developed cannot be understated. It is our hope that the government will support the work with the implementation committee along with a budget in 2020-2021 that reflects the growing rates of autism in Canada ([1 in 66 children and youth](#)), and to quickly bring about these changes so that families do not need to wait until 2021 to get the core services they've been repeatedly promised.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a 46 year history of representing thousands of families and people with ASD across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation in all areas of the province through our 25 Chapters. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com

Vision: Acceptance and Opportunities for all people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Mission: To ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

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