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For immediate release

Autism Ontario's Response to 2024 Ontario Budget

[Toronto, Ontario] As we learned during the pandemic, the challenges experienced by our most vulnerable citizens were highlighted to all Canadians in ways not previously recognized. Now, in 2024, the daily living challenges for autistic children and adults, those with neurodevelopmental conditions, and their families are greater than ever. The waiting list gaps, access to trained professionals, affordable housing, employment opportunities, and resources for caregivers remain at the forefront as Autism Ontario continues its work to advocate for a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism.

In Autism Ontario's 2024 prebudget submission to the Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance, we called for increased funding to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) that would reduce wait times and provide greater access to core services for families who are awaiting these essential services for their children. Autism Ontario welcomes the announcement of a \$120 million increase to the Ontario Autism Program.

This is good news, especially if the funds are coupled with a plan to build professional capacity in the province to deliver core services, working with colleges, universities, and private businesses to reverse the exit of professionals from the autism field who are needed to deliver these essential services — particularly in more rural, northern, and Indigenous communities.

The announcement of an increase to special education funding by \$18 million in the 2024–25 school year is promising but lacking in detail; it does not address how the gaps in staffing and educational needs for students on the autism spectrum will be met by individual boards. The OAP's efforts must be strengthened by a cross-sector collaboration between the Ministries of Education, Health, and Children, Community & Social Services. Allowing regulated health professionals to come into schools to collaborate and share knowledge about autistic students' development and effective strategies will keep students' learning needs as the primary focus.

Autism Ontario, along with countless education advocates, provided direct input to the Ministry of Education's request in its response to K-12 Education Standards Development Committee. [Investment in these recommendations](#) is critical to making truly [meaningful changes to special education](#) in Ontario.

Transitions to and through adulthood remain challenging without investments that directly support them. The Ontario Budget (p.158) stated it would add "\$310 million over three years to address increasing operational costs for community organizations..." for a variety of vulnerable populations, including inflation adjustments for ODSP and ACSDP, but it did not provide specifics about which service providers would receive those funds, what types of increases those would be, or if waiting lists or eligibility for these services would be addressed.

For more information, please email Autism Ontario's media team at media@autismontario.com.

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ABOUT AUTISM ONTARIO

[Autism Ontario](#) is the province's leading source of information and referral on autism whose mandate is to build a supportive and inclusive Ontario for autism. It provides autistic individuals and families across their life course with community-based access to meaningful supports, social learning opportunities, information, and connections. The organization's commitment to significantly and positively impacting the autism community is driven by its vision: Best life, better world, making autism matter!