

**Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Ontario Autism Program**

Frequently Asked Questions for web site

INTRODUCTION

Q1. When will families be able to access the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP)?

A1. The new OAP will begin to be implemented on June 26, 2017.

Children, youth and their families will begin transitioning to the new OAP beginning June 26 and onward. Individual family transitions will differ depending on whether they are new to service, waiting for service or currently receiving service.

We are committed to ensuring that families are supported through a smooth and seamless transition as they enter the new OAP.

For more information about your family's specific circumstances, please visit Ontario.ca/autism or call 1-888-284-8340 to connect with your regional office.

Q2. What is meant by 'single point of entry' for services in each region?

A2. Families of children with autism have told us that it was challenging to apply for two separate programs, and sometimes to have to tell their story more than once. Families will be able to access services and supports more quickly and easily through one access number in each service area.

That is why starting on June 26, there will be one entry point to access the Ontario Autism Program in each of the nine service areas. That means there will be one phone number in each of the nine service areas for families to call into.

Q3. What is meant by 'services based on need'?

A3. The OAP will provide evidence-based behavioural services. Services will be flexible, individualized and based on a child's unique needs and strengths.

The needs and strengths of a child will be assessed by an OAP Clinician. The family will be fully involved in the development of a Family Service Plan that outlines their services. The Family Service Plan is a living document that families will be able to access.

A child's progress will be reassessed, at a minimum, every six months. At that time, the Family Service Plan will be updated as the needs and strengths of children change over time.

Q4. Have parents and stakeholders been involved in the design of the new Ontario Autism Program?

A4. Yes. The province formed the Ontario Autism Program Advisory Committee in August 2016. It is made up of parents, stakeholders and other experts. They are providing advice on the design and implementation of the new program, including the approach to direct funding, and will continue to do so.

The Minister has also been meeting with parents from across the province. He has heard their stories and experiences. He will continue to engage with families throughout the development of the OAP.

ELIGIBILITY

Q1. Will there be an age cut-off for any reason for any child in the new OAP?

A1. No. In the new program, every child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnosis from a qualified professional will be assessed and will receive services based on his/her individual needs and strengths, regardless of age. Children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder will be eligible for the OAP until they turn 18.

Q2. Will children of all ages be able to receive the same services?

A2. Yes. All children and youth up to age 18 with an autism diagnosis from a qualified professional will be eligible for services in the new OAP. Eligibility for services will not be defined by age or by the severity of a child's autism.

Services will be flexible and individualized. Children will receive services based on their needs and strengths, regardless of age.

DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENTS

Q1. What are you doing to improve access to diagnostic assessments for children with symptoms of autism?

A1. Earlier this year, the government began funding five new time-limited regional ASD diagnostic hubs that are improving the availability of more timely assessments so that children can start accessing services as quickly as possible.

The hubs will provide an additional 2,000 diagnostic assessments by March 2018.

Q2. Why are these diagnostic hubs being offered for a limited time rather than on an ongoing basis?

A2. These five ASD diagnostic hubs are being implemented to improve supports for families during the transition to the new Ontario Autism Program. The capacity building and partnerships developed through these hubs are expected to continue to improve access to ASD diagnostic assessments after the hubs initiative is completed.

DIRECT FUNDING OPTION

Q1. Will there be a direct funding option in the Ontario Autism Program?

A1. Yes, a direct funding option will be available to all families in the new OAP. It will be in place by the end of this year.

We know some families prefer direct funding, where they can purchase services and support through private providers. Others prefer the direct service approach, where children and youth receive services from a government-funded service provider. We are committed to giving families this choice.

Q2. Will families be able to delay taking their spot in the OAP until a Direct Funding Option is available?

A2. Yes. If a child's spot becomes available in the new OAP before the new direct funding approach is available, the family will have the option to delay service.

TRANSITION INTO THE NEW OAP FOR FAMILIES IN SERVICE OR WAITING

Q1 . How will children and youth transition into the new Ontario Autism Program?

A1 . Children, youth and their families will start entering the new Ontario Autism Program on June 26. Each family's journey into the program will be different. It will depend on whether they are receiving or waiting for service.

We are committed to ensuring families are supported through a smooth and seamless transition as they enter the new OAP.

For more information about your family's specific circumstances, please visit Ontario.ca/autism or call 1-888-284-8340 to connect with your regional office.

Q2. Will the two existing waitlists for the Autism Intervention Program and ABA-based Services and Supports be merged?

A2. Yes, there will be one waitlist for the new Ontario Autism Program. Families will enter the OAP based on their date of referral to the current waitlist, in chronological order.

For children with different positions on the current waitlists, the earliest date of referral will be used.

New families will be added to the OAP waitlist in chronological order based on their date of referral.

Q3. How will I know where my child is on the waitlist?

A3. Right now, families can find out where their child is on the waitlist through their autism service provider.

Starting June 26, they can contact the OAP single point of access in their region.

CLINICAL DECISION MAKING

Q1. How will families be involved in decision-making?

A1. Family members are important partners in making decisions about their child's care, and will be actively involved in the assessment, goal-setting and planning process for their children along with their clinicians, service providers and other practitioners.

Q2. What is the Family Service Plan? How is it developed?

- A2. The Family Service Plan will be a living document. It will change over time. It will reflect shifting priorities, the child's developmental stage, transition planning and progress toward goals.

The Family Service Plan may include:

- Key information about the child and their family, priorities, needs and strengths
- Current and previous assessments
- Behavioural intervention plan, including goal(s) with measureable targets
- Transition plans within and out of the OAP
- Family services and/or education

Q3. What happens if families disagree with their child's assessment or service plan?

- A3. Parents will be actively involved in the assessment, goal-setting and planning process for their children.

Beginning in Fall 2017, there will be an appeals process for the OAP. Families will be able to request an independent review of their child's plan for behavioural intervention. More details on this will follow at a later date.

Q4. What will the intensity of services be?

- A4. Children will receive intervention that is flexible. The intensity and duration of services is based on their unique needs, regardless of age or severity of autism.

The intensity and type of intervention will be different for each child. Services will change over time based on many factors in a child's life, including developmental stage, family circumstances and school placement. Services will shift to respond to the needs and strengths of the child and family.

Q5. Will service be continuous or will it be provided in blocks, with families returning to waitlists, like in the current program?

- A5. We have heard from families that the current blocks of service may not be intensive or long enough to address their child's needs.

Our commitment is to provide intervention that is flexible and individualized so that the intensity and duration of services will not be based on any predetermined level or time. The intensity and duration of services will be based on a child's individual needs. Families will be actively involved in the assessment, goal setting and intervention planning process.

Q6. Will children/youth be “discharged” from the program?

A 6. No. Children will remain in the OAP until they turn 18, or until their parents wish to withdraw them from the program, or they no longer have an ASD diagnosis. Individualized transition plans could be developed with input from other service providers in the community or in educational settings.

REGULATION OF ABA SERVICES

Q1. I heard about the government’s intent to regulate service providers, what does that mean?

A1. Our goal is to have safe, effective ABA services. Families need to have confidence in their providers and know where to go when they have a concern. The government is working on an approach to the oversight of ABA services that would achieve this goal.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is working with the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care to identify the best approach to achieving oversight of ABA practitioners.

SCHOOL SUPPORTS

Q5. What is Ontario doing to supports kids in school as the province transitions to the Ontario Autism Program?

A5. We are working with the Ministry of Education to support school-aged children and youth as the OAP is implemented.

In June 2016, the Ministry of Education announced \$39M in one-time funding to support school boards through the transition. This includes:

- Meeting the increased demand for Connections for Students transition teams;
- Providing school-based team support to support all students impacted by changes to autism services; and
- Providing funding to run After School Skills Development Programs.

This funding will continue to support school boards through the 2017/18 school year.