

Ontario Transforming Autism Services for Children and Their Families

All Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder Eligible for New Ontario Autism Program

June 8, 2017

NEWS

The province is transforming the way that children and youth with autism, and their families, receive services and supports through the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP), beginning later this month.

Minister of Children and Youth Services Michael Coteau made the announcement today at the ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development in Mississauga. The new OAP will ensure autism services for children and youth are delivered consistently across the province, allow for flexibility and choice based on each child's needs, and give families confidence in receiving quality services.

On June 26, families will begin to transition into the new OAP. The key components of the new program, beginning this month, include:

- **A single point of access.** There will be one entry point to the OAP in each of the nine service areas to make it easier for families to access services for their child.
- **Family-centred decision making.** As key partners in their child's care, families will be actively engaged in the assessment, goal-setting and intervention planning process for their child.
- **Collaborative approach to service.** A foundation of the new OAP will be the collaborative approach taken by community support service providers, clinicians and educators to support children's needs at home, during service and in school.
- **Service based on need.** Services will be flexible and individualized. The intensity and duration of the services a child or youth receives is based on their needs and strengths, regardless of age. Each child's service plan will be determined by clinical assessment.
- **A direct funding option.** A new direct funding option will be implemented by the end of this year. This will provide all families with a choice between receiving direct service or receiving funding to purchase their child's service.
- **Safe, effective autism services.** The province intends to regulate ABA practitioners to help ensure families receive safe, high-quality services, have confidence in their providers and know where to go if they have a concern.

The government is committed to ensuring families are supported through a smooth and seamless transition as they enter the new OAP. Transition planning within the new program will be individualized, planned in advance and will be achieved in partnership with each child's family, OAP professionals and service providers. Children and youth with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder from a qualified professional will be eligible for the OAP up until the age of 18.

The province has worked closely with families, caregivers, advocates, clinicians and providers to build the new OAP, and will continue to engage with key stakeholders, including the OAP Advisory Committee, on the design and implementation of the new program. The new OAP will be fully in place by spring 2018.

QUOTES

“Our government is committed to ensuring that the new OAP will be co-ordinated, family-centered and responsive to children’s unique needs, strengths and goals. I’m confident that families will be well-supported through the transition into the new program. For several months, I’ve worked directly with parents and caregivers to ensure this program is one that helps their child succeed and thrive. The regulation of ABA practitioners will also give families confidence in their providers and create consistent services across the province. I look forward to following young people’s success through the new program.”

— Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services

“Today’s announcement demonstrates a progressive approach to autism service delivery in Ontario. The Minister has taken into consideration many of the concerns raised by parents. The new Ontario Autism Program sets a new, higher standard for services for children and youth with autism. The Ontario Autism Coalition is pleased that age, severity and additional diagnoses will no longer affect eligibility for services. Regulation of behaviour analysts is another important step forward, one which was part of our original request to the government, 12 years ago. We look forward to a successful and effective implementation of the new OAP and we will continue to work with the Minister to ensure that Ontario children and youth with autism are given every opportunity to live to their full potential.”

— Bruce McIntosh, President, OAP Advisory Committee

“With today’s announcement, the Minister of Children and Youth Services has taken the first step towards an Ontario Autism Program that puts individuals and families first by ensuring that clinical decisions are based first-and-foremost, on each individual’s unique needs. A commitment to pursuing the public regulation of behaviour analysts, with the necessary interim protections, helps ensure that high-quality behavioural services will be provided by appropriately qualified, regulated behaviour analytic professionals. Ontario’s behaviour analysts are optimistic about the impact this commitment can have on the lives of individuals receiving behaviour analytic services over the lifespan and across multiple service sectors.”

— Louis Busch, President, Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis

“ErinoakKids is honoured to be the site of Minister Coteau’s announcement of the new OAP - a transformative program that is inclusive of all children and youth with autism, is flexible and adaptable to their unique needs, and puts parents firmly at the center of decision making regarding treatment and supports for their children. This innovative, inter-professional, collaborative approach to care is synonymous with service delivery philosophies and programming already in place at ErinoakKids. As the new OAP is implemented, we look forward to continued partnership with families, service providers and MCYS in promoting choice-based, responsive, quality services and supports to children and youth of all ages with autism.”

— Bridget Fewtrell, President and CEO, ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development

QUICK FACTS

- Parents can call 1-888-284-8340 toll-free for more information or to find their nearest ministry regional office.
- Minister Coteau will be hosting a tele town hall on June 27 at 5:30 p.m. to answer parents’ questions. More details will be available on Ontario.ca/autism
- The new program includes 16,000 new spaces over five years, so that more children and youth with autism can receive the services they need sooner.

- Families who are currently receiving direct funding to purchase services will continue receiving this funding until their child enters the new OAP.
- Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong, complex neurodevelopmental disorder. It is characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction and repetitive behaviour. Symptoms of autism vary significantly and range in severity.
- Ontario is investing an unprecedented half-billion dollars over five years to create new services for children and youth with ASD.
- There are an estimated 40,000 children and youth in Ontario with ASD.
Based on the most recent prevalence rate from the United States Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, prevalence has grown from 1 in 150 in 2002 to 1 in 68 in 2010.

LEARN MORE

- For more information, including an OAP implementation timeline, visit www.ontario.ca/autism.

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