

# **Transforming Developmental Services in Ontario**

**June 2006  
Ontario Public Service Employees Union**



## **Ontario Public Service Employees Union's response to: 'Opportunities and Action: Transforming supports in Ontario for people who have a developmental disability'**

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Please accept this paper as the Ontario Public Service Employees Union's (OPSEU) response to 'Opportunities and Action: Transforming supports in Ontario for people who have a developmental disability,' the Ministry of Community and Social Services' draft plan for changing developmental service delivery.

OPSEU represents more than 6,000 frontline developmental service workers in communities all across Ontario. Our members' close relationships with the individuals they support and their families, along with years of experience, provide them with significant insight into what is needed in the sector.

### **Background**

There is no question improvements are required in how developmental services are delivered in Ontario.

Ontario is facing a crisis in the delivery of services and supports to people with developmental disabilities and their families. The need for improvements and change has been identified by people with developmental disabilities, their families, government, staff and caregivers, and transfer payment agencies.

Despite slight funding increases over the past few years, more than a decade of cuts and chronic under-funding has resulted in cuts to services, cuts to community outings and activities for residential clients, increased use of part-time and casual staff, poor wages, serious problems in staff recruitment and retention and a huge growth in waiting lists.

Ongoing medical advancement has meant the survival of many more babies with developmental disabilities and a significant increase in life expectancy. This has resulted in a continuing growth in Ontario's population of individuals with a developmental disability and correspondingly, a continuing increase in the need for developmental service supports.

As with the baby-boom in general, Ontario is also facing a dramatic increase in the aging population of people with developmental disabilities, resulting in changing service needs as they experience accelerated aging and declining health.

As well, we face the issue of aging parents who have been caring for their adult child at home, but are now facing their own declining health and need to find services to make sure their child is cared for.

This means many people with developmental disabilities and their families aren't getting the services they need, and the quality of service is declining for those who have them.

At the same time the government is planning to move 1000 of the highest needs people with developmental disabilities out of the three remaining Regional Centres and into the community. The government has not presented a clear plan on how it will meet their

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needs and has made no clear commitment to transfer all funding now dedicated to running the Regional Centres into the community-based system.

**As we address the many changes required to improve services to all people with developmental disabilities it is critical to first note, though many improvements can be made to the current service delivery model, the reality must be acknowledged that dramatic increases in funding are essential to any plan that professes to meet the needs of this growing and vulnerable population.**

### **Needs assessment**

As the government's draft transformation document acknowledges, significant disparities exist in the level of care people with developmental disabilities receive. There is a lack of clarity in qualifying criteria from program to program and even finding out what services exist is difficult.

It is critical that all people with developmental disabilities receive the services they need. OPSEU supports the development of a standardized needs assessment that includes, but is not restricted to, degree of disability and/or multiple disabilities; corresponding health or mental health issues; individual's strengths and goals; and family's needs.

It is essential that the necessary services be provided to those identified as needing more services than they currently receive.

OPSEU is very concerned about language in the government's transformation document that suggests those currently receiving service may lose those services in an attempt to equalize service delivery. On page 37 of 'Opportunities and Action: Transforming supports in Ontario for people who have a developmental disability,' the government states: (emphasis added)

“Individuals and families **may** continue to receive some or all of their services from an agency.”

It is imperative that individuals and their families receive assurances from the government that the implementation of a standardized individual needs assessment will not result in any loss of services currently being provided.

### **Access to services**

The need for simplifying how individuals and their families access services is imperative. The government's proposal to create single point access for the purpose of inquiry, information, assessment, service application, etc. has the potential to improve the current system. The proposal also raises great concerns.

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Recreating the Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) model that exists in the homecare sector would be a disaster for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Though the CCAC model provides single point access, in practice it's resulted in a rationing of services with many people receiving significant cut backs in the services they had, and some losing their services altogether. The CCAC model also set up a competitive bidding process that has led to regular turn over in care providers, poor quality services as providers cut corners to reduce costs, low wages for staff resulting in high turn over and less qualified staff.

It's also critical that any move to a single point access system stay within the developmental service sector and not get lost in a multi-sectoral access model such as Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs.) This would inevitably lead to developmental services having to compete with other sectors for priority.

### **Individual assessment and planning**

As is the case with everyone, no two people with developmental disabilities are alike. This is why it's imperative that developmental services are structured to meet the distinct needs of each individual.

We applaud the government's proposal to develop an individual assessment and planning process based on each person's needs, creating a service plan that meets individual goals and needs.

OPSEU also supports the long-term planning approach proposed, focusing on individual applications at key stages in the person's life but allowing for re-evaluation at any time if there is a change in circumstance.

We are however, concerned about the proposed establishment of a network of independent planners/service brokers. The role a planner/service broker would play in the proposed transformation is a critical one for most individuals and their families who don't have the time or knowledge to navigate the system. A dependency on this individual is inherent to the proposed system.

An independent broker system leaves families vulnerable to significant disparities in the quality of their broker. It sets up a situation where it will often be too late by the time and individual or family realizes they're not receiving the quality of service they need. It also sets up a system where service providers are dependent upon private brokers for their clients and therefore funding. This raises significant concerns about the unintentional development of a lobby system and the development of currying favour to ensure clients.

OPSEU supports the use of planners working with individuals and their families to develop a service plan that meets their needs, but it is essential that this is provided within a strong, regulated system.

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### **Funding**

As mentioned previously, funding is one of the most critical components of any transformation to the developmental service sector. Finding efficiencies within the current system will not begin to address the serious funding shortage in this sector nor will it address the reality of a demographic that is on a steady incline. We are very concerned that the government's draft transformation document does not address this issue.

Outside of the lack of services for thousands of people who are now on waiting lists, two of the biggest problems that have been created by the current funding shortfall are staff retention, recruitment and training, and a decline in community outings.

The government's transformation document mentions the difficulties the developmental service sector faces when it comes to recruiting and maintaining qualified staff. The only proposed solution to this problem is a grant program meant to attract students, studying the health professions, into training placements in developmental service agencies.

As it stands now, most community colleges have been forced to cancel their developmental service training programs due to a lack of enrollment. Young people looking at a career in developmental services see the wages they can expect once they have graduated and conclude it's not a viable option. Encouraging student placements in the sector won't address the long-term recruitment and retention problems without addressing the serious wage gap that exists between the developmental service sector and equivalent positions in other sectors such as municipalities, health and education.

Funding shortfalls and rising transportation costs have also forced developmental service workers in residential programs to substantially reduce the number of community outings they do with their clients. The government highlights the importance of inclusion as one of the key principals upon which the transformation must be based. Frontline workers know how important this is to the clients they serve. The government must acknowledge that lack of funding is a significant barrier to attaining the inclusion people with developmental disabilities have a right to expect.

As well as our concerns regarding the funding shortage, we have serious concerns about the funding model that seems to be the focus of the government's plans. While we applaud your direction when it comes to the development of standardized assessment and the development of individual plans, we cannot say the same for your focus on how those plans will be funded.

The draft transformation document repeatedly refers to individual plans resulting in an individual budget allocation rather than a service plan. Where a service plan would set up an obligation to ensure each individual receives the services they need, an individual budget allocation sets up a system where the money allocated does not match the reality

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of the overall cost to provide those services. This automatically undermines a strong agency system that is critical to ensuring high standards and quality services and care.

Moving to a funding system where agency funding is based on the individual budgets of each client they attract is unsustainable. It does not allow for any long-term planning or program development. Without reliable base funding to cover overhead and operational costs agencies will be forced to cut corners resulting in a deterioration of services.

Another likely outcome would be the creation of a two-tier system where families and individuals who can afford to top up the government allocated funds receive one level of care while those who can't are forced to purchase bottom end care.

### **Family responsibility**

There is no question the role of families is paramount to the support and care individuals with a developmental disability need, but parents can't do it alone. The developmental service sector has been built over decades to provide the supports families need through childhood and adolescence and the support individuals with developmental disabilities need as they become adults.

OPSEU is extremely concerned regarding the direction of the government's draft transformation document when it comes to family responsibility. The document outlines what is tantamount to a substantial download of current government responsibilities to parents and even siblings.

The document suggests the government's planned transformation will focus government funded services and supports toward those individuals with high needs and look to families as the primary form of support for most adult children with developmental disabilities.

Tax breaks, creative savings initiatives and financial planning advice are all useful supports for parents of a developmentally disabled child. They cannot and should not replace government funded services that are needed to promote and strengthen the abilities and independence of individuals, enhance their quality of life and remove barriers to full participation in society where at all possible.

### **Strong agency system and accountability**

Though there are definitely improvements needed in the current agency-based system, agencies have decades of experience providing a wide variety of supports to individuals with developmental disabilities. Agencies have also led the way in creatively adapting programming to the meet the needs of this growing and diverse population, and are eager to continue.

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As the government points out in its draft transformation document, the safety and security of people with developmental disabilities must be an intrinsic part of all services and supports provided. Any programs and services that receive government funding must be regulated and accountable. To this end, more could and should be done to ensure quality control in the agency-based system. There are a range of mechanisms now in place to make agencies accountable for the care and programs they provide such as a checklist of requirements and service contracts. It's OPSEU's opinion that these do not go far enough in ensuring people with developmental disabilities are receiving high quality care.

We believe it is imperative that the government implement an accreditation process that all developmental service providers must attain.

Any transformation of the developmental service sector must work within the agency-based system to provide the diversity of services and supports required through a regulated system. The development of individual plans should allow people with developmental disabilities and their families to work with a planner to create a service plan that works best suits their needs. The government needs to work with the agencies to ensure they are able to meet those diverse needs.

Most people with developmental disabilities receive their services through the agency system and want it to remain that way. OPSEU has serious concerns that the government's transformation plans focus on individual and family choice to the detriment of a strong agency system.

Moving to a system that puts the onus on individuals and their families to 'shop around and purchase' services in or out of the agency-based system makes it impossible to ensure quality control.

### **Conclusion**

A wide spectrum of individuals fall under the definition of developmentally disabled, from high functioning and independent to non-verbal and non-mobile, with issues of mental health and aging also factoring into the level and type of support services they need.

The developmental services sector must address the issue of individuality when transforming services and create a coordinated network of services that works for everyone.

OPSEU strongly recommends the government focus on individual planning and service provision rather than individual funding. Family input is critical in ensuring people with developmental disabilities get the level of service they need and the quality of service they deserve. However, there are a number of structural problems with the individualized funding model:

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- Loss of accountability for the quality of services provided.
- It adds a further level of complication to the lives of most families that they simply do not need.
- Instability in funding and staffing of community agencies, lowering the quality of services across the board.

What families really need is an easy way to access services and the peace of mind that their loved one is receiving quality care.

Individuals and their families need a coordinated network of services where they are able to work with experts to develop an individualized service plan that meets their unique needs and provides easy access to all the comprehensive and diverse community based programs that exist in Ontario. This must include access to appropriate housing and supported employment, day programs, homecare, recreation, appropriate therapy, health and dental programs, respite care, long-term care.

The government must rethink its proposal to move to a system of individualized funding for most individuals with developmental disabilities. What is being guised as increasing individual choice is actual a recipe for a serious erosion in the quality of service and in the level of services most individuals with developmental disabilities will receives.



Authorized for distribution by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leah Casselman".

Leah Casselman  
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