

RECONSIDERING  
ONTARIO'S NEW  
AUTISM PROGRAM



**EDUCATION  
WATCH**

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## BACKGROUND

The Government of Ontario proposed sweeping changes to the Ontario Autism Program early in 2016. Under this new strategy, the Ontario government will remove access to Intensive Behaviour Intervention (IBI) therapy for thousands of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Instead, children with ASD who are five years of age or over will have to apply for an applied behaviour analysis (ABA) program, which is much less intensive and may not yield the same results.

The new program will offer fractured services to children at a time when reductions to school board funding are resulting in less special education support. This combination may have a significant negative impact upon children with ASD.



## ADVERSE IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Many children with ASD have waited months and even years to receive IBI therapy. The proposed changes to the program would see those children lose their place on the waitlist, and/or become ineligible to receive IBI therapy because they are five years of age or older.

The government's plan to provide a one-year allocation of \$8,000 to many children on those waitlists may be insufficient to cover the true costs of IBI therapy. Privately funded IBI therapy can cost upwards of \$30,000 per year. Providing direct funding to individual parents requires them to not only fund the therapy but also personally make up the shortfall in treatment costs. This is unfair and will put undue hardship on those children who have waited years for this important therapy.

The proposed plan offers intermittent support to families whose children require ongoing support and treatment. Families are likely to face a series of gaps in service for their child with ASD and will then be unable to address the negative consequences for their child.



A parent can expect to pay upwards of \$30,000 per year for IBI therapy.



The government must support families by continuing to provide access to therapy for children with ASD.

## INADEQUATE SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN WITH ASD

School board personnel are already working beyond their capacity when supporting children with ASD. Despite modest increases to special education funding allocations in recent years by the Ministry of Education, it has not been enough to keep up with the added pressures that school boards face in delivering quality programs and support for children with ASD.

A lack of sustained, adequate funding to support children with special needs, including for those children with ASD, has put greater pressure on teachers and support staff who work with students. This lack of adequate funding for special education has led to:

- Increased pressure on school boards to layoff support staff, including those who work one-on-one with children with ASD.
- Fewer opportunities for training of teachers and support staff on how to best support children with ASD.
- Additional stress on families with children with ASD due to fewer resources and supports in our schools.

The proposed changes to the Ontario Autism Program would see a reduction in the access to IBI therapy. Along with inadequate funding to special education funding in our schools, this could lead to fewer positive outcomes for children with ASD.



## CONCLUSION

The proposed changes to the Ontario new autism program will potentially have detrimental effects on children with ASD. The government's proposal to restrict access to IBI therapy to children under the age of five is unfair to those who have waited for months or years to access the therapy recommended to them by professionals.

In addition, the proposed changes by the government will put increased pressure on school boards to provide additional support to children with ASD. These supports and resources are already strained.

The government needs to rethink its approach to better support children with ASD. Ongoing access to all necessary supports should be the goal of a new program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the Ontario government:

- **Immediately reassess plans** to change the Ontario Autism Program that would prevent any child diagnosed with ASD from receiving government supported Intensive Behavioural Intervention therapy.
- **Fully fund services that allow** children with ASD to access the therapy that works best.
- **Increase the number of school board** personnel who directly support children with ASD in our schools, including IBI specialists.
- **Reconsider a year round** school-based model to provide ongoing support to this vulnerable population of students.
- **Provide education workers** employed by school boards with additional training and support so they can offer comprehensive assistance to children with ASD.

For more information please call  
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