

Question 291

MPP French — Enquiry of the Ministry — Would the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services please confirm whether his Ministry will be transparent about how many children have been assessed into each funding level of the pilot under the Ontario Autism Program and what each of their funding allotments will be. (Tabled March 1, 2021)

Response:

Our government is adopting the recommendations of the Ontario Autism Advisory Panel which are serving as a strong foundation as we move forward with a comprehensive, needs-based and family-centred Ontario Autism Program.

All children and youth, under the age of 18 and living in Ontario, who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder from a qualified professional are eligible for the OAP.

In the needs-based OAP families will have access to a broader range of core clinical services such as applied behaviour analysis, speech language therapy, occupational therapy and mental health services. Children and youth will also be able to access foundational family services and urgent response services when required, as well as caregiver-mediated early years programs and the entry to school program for young children.

In March the ministry began inviting children and youth, representing a diverse sample of OAP registrants, to participate in the launch of core clinical services, a critical step forward in the ongoing implementation of the new needs-based program. This diverse sample of OAP registrants includes children and youth of different ages, genders, current service plans and geographic areas from across the province. Feedback received from families will help to evaluate and refine the process as the ministry proceeds with the full provincewide implementation.

The ministry has asked the Child and Parent Resource Institute to oversee the launch of core clinical services. Guided by a standardized tool, a care coordinator will ask the family a series of questions to understand the child's or youth's goals and strengths, as well as their support needs across nine domains, including:

- Communication
- Social interaction
- Play and leisure
- Activities of daily living
- Motor skills
- Cognitive skills
- Sensory system
- Interfering behaviours
- Mental health

In addition to the nine domains, the care coordinator will consider factors such as developmental and life stages, as well as co-existing health and environmental factors. A family may also choose to share previous reports with their care coordinator to support the determination of needs process.

Based on the results of this standardised and clinically-informed process, care coordinators will identify the intensity of support needs as being extensive, moderate or limited across different age ranges. The determination of needs process will result in an OAP funding allocation for core clinical services and will be completed with each family, at least annually, to help ensure a child's changing support needs are reflected over time. These allocations were informed by published research and provincial data with input from clinical experts from the Implementation Working Group, to reflect the estimated amount of service that a child with a defined level of support need might access. Families will work directly with their chosen clinician(s) to develop treatment options and plans for their child.

The ministry is developing an independent review process, with ongoing feedback from the Implementation Working Group, that will be available to families accessing core clinical services in the OAP.

To support families during the transition to the needs-based OAP and recognizing the challenges and uncertainty families are facing as a result of COVID-19, the government will be offering an additional extension of interim funding. This funding will allow families to purchase eligible services and supports they feel are most appropriate for their children.

Our increased \$600 million annual investment in services for children and youth on the autism spectrum includes a focus on building capacity across the province. The Implementation Working Group is providing input to the government on a number of key design elements of the new program, including how to build more capacity in the system.

We will continue to provide regular updates on program details and what the transition will look like for children and their families every step of the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Todd Smith', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Hon. Todd Smith
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services