

## **For Immediate Release**

### **Autism Ontario's Response to the 2008 Ontario Budget**

**March 25, 2008 (Toronto).** Consistent with pre-budget media messaging, this was a budget meant to stay the course from last year's announcements, warn about the continuing impact of economic woes south of the border which have an impact on the Canadian economy, and to ask federal leaders to step up to the plate in supporting provincial initiatives that are good for Canadians. For families of children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders, they will need to read very closely between the lines to see specific benefits for these vulnerable citizens.

#### **Health/Mental Health:**

**Access to Health Care:** We will need to carefully watch whether or not "\$53 million over the next three years to add 50 more Family Health Teams...targeting rural and underserved communities" (p.61) assists with earlier screening and diagnosis of children with autism.

Additional funds, "80 million over the next three years to improve mental health and addiction...and early intervention for psychosis" are indicated as part of the development of a comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy (p.63).

"\$20 million to support children with complex special needs".

#### **Children with ASD:**

**No good news about waiting lists for IBI:** One of the most worrisome challenges for children with autism in the early years is that no new funds are being earmarked to reduce the wait list for IBI. Without additional funds, Ontario will not be able to address the problem it currently faces with the growing list of children based on current prevalence rates, which are being reported at 1 in 150 children diagnosed.

**Improving Facilities:** Ontario is "investing \$30 million in one-time funding for capital projects to support community agencies that provide services to children and vulnerable populations, including...adults and children with developmental disabilities; and youth with emotional or behavioural problems". Childrens Treatment Centres fall under this funding.

**Respite and Summer Camp Support:** Autism Ontario gratefully acknowledges additional supports provided in the past year to provide regional and provincial support for summer camp supports and respite programs. These programs support parents in ways that address the specific participation needs of children and youth with ASD.

**Students with ASD:**

Most noteworthy is that “the government will provide \$24 million in additional targeted funding outside the GSN to support students with special needs” (page 56). In part, these funds will assist with the continued and expanding Collaborative Service Model for students with ASD. Additional sites, continued training to boards, and increased knowledge for ABA (PPM-140) in schools fall under this budget item. This is good news.

**High School Transitions:** Student Success Teams now include the word “special education teacher” (p. 56). Parents should be asking how students with ASD in their high school years might benefit from the work of these teams, particularly in response to the major transition hurdle faced when these students leave school. The question remains – where do these students go when they graduate, and to what?

**Adults with ASD:** Children with autism grow up to be adults with autism. Funds to support the specific needs of this population have barely begun to have an impact on the needs and numbers of individuals affected. Passport Funding remains a hopeful program that needs a significant increase in funding. It is difficult to find anything in this budget that addresses that serious gap that will continue to grow as students with ASD leave the school system and enter adult life.

**Other news that could positively affect some families living with children and adults with ASD:**

- Dental care for Low-Income Families (p. 47). Additional supports for dental care to be increased to age 18.
- Ontario Child Benefit (p. 49) Starting in July 2008,
  - “the OCB will be delivered monthly through the personal income tax system and will assist all low-income families with children under age 18,
  - The OCB is being phased in over a five-year period, increasing annually until July 2011. At the same time, social assistance benefits for children and the Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families (OCCS) will be replaced by the OCB.
  - Once the OCB is fully implemented, nearly 1.3 million children will receive annual OCB payments of up to \$1,100 per child. Families will receive an additional \$2.1 billion cumulatively over the first five years.”
- Increased Support for Social Assistance (p.50): It is proposed that a 2% increase in basic adult allowance and maximum shelter allowance be increased in 2008-09. Families receiving Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities will benefit from this increase. We are still far behind in getting this support to meaningful levels. ODSP also increases by 2%.

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