

## **New Children's Autism Program to Provide Faster, More Effective Services**

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The province is investing an additional \$333 million over the next five years to launch the new Ontario Autism Program so more children and youth receive critical interventions earlier and services are better matched to their needs.

The new program will help deliver the right services as early as possible. Research has shown that early intervention can have a significant impact on a child's development.

### **Ontario's Current Programs**

There are currently two clinical intervention programs to support children and youth with autism: Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)-based services and supports and Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI).

ABA uses scientific principles of learning and behaviour to increase functional life skills.

Through ABA-based services and supports, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) receive help to improve their communication, social, emotional and daily living skills.

IBI is an application of ABA that teaches new skills in an intensive format, about 20 or more hours per week, primarily in a one-to-one setting.

### Current Waitlists

There are an estimated 40,000 children and youth in Ontario with ASD. Prevalence rates have risen 123 per cent in the last decade. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States, in 2002, one in 150 children was diagnosed with autism. By 2010, that number had risen to one in 68 children. Because of the increasing numbers of children and youth in Ontario with ASD, there are more children waiting for autism services than receiving services in Ontario. On average, children wait more than two years to receive IBI services and more than one year for ABA-based services and supports.

### Age-Appropriate Services

Families and clinical experts have told government that children are not able to access intensive services, or IBI, when scientific evidence shows they will benefit most, between the ages of two

and four. Many children currently waiting for and receiving IBI are no longer in this appropriate developmental window.

With two separate intervention programs, families often experience multiple intake processes, separate waitlists and long wait times for both programs.

### **The New Ontario Autism Program: Better Outcomes for Children, Youth and their Families**

The transition to the new Ontario Autism Program will happen over the next two years.

The new, more flexible program will combine ABA and IBI into a single expanded and improved program. In the new program, children will receive faster, more individualized and responsive services sooner, based on their needs; it will be easier for families to access services; and children will be able to transition between interventions at varying levels of intensity as their needs change over time.

The new approach to delivering autism services is informed by advice from families, clinical experts, other stakeholders and the Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinical Expert Committee, and is consistent with scientific evidence.

To ensure a successful transition from the current program to the future program, the government will establish an advisory group of service providers, parents and other experts to provide strategic advice.

#### Future Waitlists

Within two years, the changes to the program are projected to drop provincial wait times by more than half, on average. By 2021, the goal is to achieve average wait times of six months or less in the new autism program.

#### Receiving Age-Appropriate Services Sooner

Ontario is making the following changes so more children and youth with autism receive critical interventions earlier that are better matched to their needs;

- Reducing wait times so children can access services sooner
- Transitioning to a new integrated autism program by:
  - Focusing IBI services to children in the appropriate developmental window - ages two to four
  - Gradually transitioning children five years and older currently receiving IBI to more intensive ABA services that are suited to their needs
  - Providing families with children five years and older on the IBI waitlist with \$8,000 in one-time funding to immediately purchase community services or supports based on their children's specific needs as they transition off the IBI waitlist
  - Increasing the duration and intensity of ABA services over four years, starting in 2017, so that services are more flexible and based on children's individual needs.

- Launching four pre-diagnosis early intervention pilots in 2016. Early intervention services will be expanded beginning in 2019-20 so toddlers and preschoolers receive early support.
- Improving support for students with autism, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. This will include improvements to transitions in the education system.

### **Engaging Families**

Beginning in April, Ontario will host online sessions in partnership with Autism Ontario for families to learn more about the transition to the new Ontario Autism Program.

### **Supports for All Ontarians**

Ontarians with autism need support throughout their lives. As these changes are made to improve children's autism services, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services will continue working across government to strengthen the supports available for all people with autism, including students while they are in school and youth transitioning to postsecondary education, employment and community life.

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