



MPP LOBBYING KIT

February 2019

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GENERAL INFORMATION

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is a process, which involves writing letters and meeting with politicians about concerns that we have. We lobby because we want the system to improve. We lobby because we live in a democratic society and it is our right to lobby. We are presently lobbying the government to rethink the changes they recently announced to the Ontario Autism Program. We are lobbying because we are concerned for the future of our children and all of the children and their families who live with Autism.

Who do we lobby?

Depending on what program we want to implement changes, we lobby either the MP or MPP. The MPs and MPPs are the ones who bring ideas forward, make changes, and vote on the laws that affect our children. In our case, we are lobbying our MPPs who are representatives for the Ontario Government. The MPPs in each riding belong to one of the three parties (PCs, NDPs, or Liberals). We are presently lobbying the PC MPPs as we have a majority government in which the PCs are in power. We are also lobbying opposition MPPs as they also can influence the party in power by applying pressure.

How to Lobby

Advocating effectively involves three important components:

- 1) a strong key message,
- 2) 1-2 key “asks” or solutions (things that you want to see happen or change) and
- 3) a personal story.

Please use the documents in this kit to help you determine which key messages are important to you, how the decisions that the government is making is affecting your child/family and what “ask” is important to you.

What this lobby kit contains:

1. The key talking points that you may want to focus on in your meeting. These notes will help guide your discussion. It provides the facts that you need as you ask for what is needed.
2. An MPP Letter/Email template, which can be used to contact your MPP to set up a meeting or to connect with your MPP
3. A follow up letter template to your MPP to be sent after your meeting
4. An MPP meeting report form. After you meet with your MPP, you can complete this form for your own reference. You will want to document the promises that your MPP made.

KEY TALKING POINTS

1. **A system of age-based funding is wrong**

We all know that a birthday doesn't change someone's level of need. We fought hard with the previous government to ensure that the funding assigned to an individual was based on the recommendation of a *clinician*, not some arbitrary date on a calendar. Children with autism should receive the services they need when they need it.

2. **Children with autism need to receive a clinically appropriate amount of therapy to live to their full potential**

No two people with autism are the same. Some are verbal, some aren't. Some have intellectual disabilities, others don't. Ignoring these differences and giving everyone the same amount of funding isn't right. Some people with autism need 30+ hours per week of ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis) to make gains, some need much less. Giving everyone a subclinical amount of therapy is wrong. Equitable funding means considering the needs of each individual in service. This results in optimal funding for each child with ASD, efficient use of government funds, and best outcomes for all children with ASD. Equality is not equity.

3. **The financial burden that this will shift to families will be devastating**

Several years ago the Ontario Autism Coalition surveyed its membership and we learned that families with children on the spectrum file for bankruptcy at 120% of the rate in the general population. The high cost of intensive ABA services, and all of the other services required for a child with autism are crushing. This move will damage families.

4. **Meaningful ABA in schools is crucial**

The U.S. and other Canadian provinces routinely use ABA in the classroom to teach students with autism, and they do it better than we do here in Ontario. If the Ministry of Education stepped up and properly funded ABA in schools, it would take substantial pressure off the OAP waitlist. Education Assistants must be trained as they are the front line workers in the classroom (Understanding the science of behaviour will help them support all students--not just the ones with autism!)

5. **There is still a capacity issue**

The reality is that we don't have enough ABA therapists, Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (or BCBAAs) or psychologists who specialize in autism in Ontario. Because we don't have enough specialists, we're going to have a waitlist, no matter *how* the money is distributed. The Government must invest in education and professional development programs that will increase the number of qualified experts in the province.

6. **Regulation of practitioners of behaviour analysis**

The previous government talked about regulating ABA in Ontario but failed to take action. Today, anyone can claim to be an ABA practitioner. Individuals without training, certification, liability insurance or even a criminal record check are working with vulnerable kids – and some are taking advantage of desperate families. Regulated ABA providers would be bound by codes of conduct, require training on local laws, and meet rigorous professional standards of practice. Quality is important and our kids are *worth* the effort.

MEETING WITH YOUR LOCAL MPP

1. Find out who your MPP is and get their contact information

Find out your electoral district by visiting the following website:

<https://voterinformationservice.elections.on.ca/en/election/search?mode=electoralDistrict>

Once you know what electoral district you live in, find your MPP by visiting the following website:

http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_current.do?locale=en

2. Send an email or letter asking to set up a meeting (refer to the template on page 6 of this document)

3. Set up an appointment to meet with your MPP

- If you have not heard back from your MPP constituency office within 3 days after sending your email or letter, call your MPP's constituency office to set up a meeting. MPPs are usually in their offices on Friday. This is their day to meet with their constituents. If the Legislature isn't sitting, they are available most days.
- Speak with the MPP's assistant or their coordinator. Formally schedule a meeting. Be polite to whomever you are speaking with. They are what is standing in the way between you and your MPP. Being rude results in lost credibility and they will be less likely to want to assist you.
- You may need to call the office more than once. You may need to leave more than one message. Be persistent.

4. Decide who will be coming with you to the meeting

You may want to bring other people to the meeting such as ABA therapists, teachers, etc., but do not invite more than 2-3 people. Additionally, it is better that those who you invite to the meeting live in the electoral district (often MPPs only wish to assist and meet with their own constituents).

5. Preparing for the meeting

- 1-2 days before the meeting, call the MPP's office to re-confirm the meeting. If the meeting needs to be rescheduled, be polite.
- Advise the office who will be attending the meeting with you. Enquire about how long your appointment will be. Make sure you can get your message across in 15 minutes as these meetings are generally short.
- Review the most current issues about the Ontario Autism Program and the issues at hand. Review the talking points provided in this kit.
- Bring notes with you that you can refer to during the meeting.
- Arrive to the meeting a few minutes early.

6. During the meeting

- You have a time limit so manage your time so that you get to the “ask.”
- Politicians love to talk—it’s big part of what they’re paid to do—so if they eat up too much of *your* time, interject with something like “I know your time is valuable and I want to be sure you’re able to hear my/our message.”
- Tell your story (refer to the document in this kit), but keep it on point. They hear a lot of these stories and we love to talk about our kids.
- Tell your MPP how the Ontario Autism Program has failed your child.
- Refer to the talking points provided in this kit.
- Be assertive.
- Speak to solutions, rather than problems. Do not get into any arguments.
- Be friendly. Do not be rude.
- Have a plan of who will speak and when they will speak. Make sure all points are covered.
- Point out what information you have about the MPP’s views on the situation that you can support. You want to convey a sense of collaboration.
- Leave time at the end of the meeting to provide the MPP an opportunity to ask questions.
- Ensure that your MPP understands what it is you are asking, and advise them that you will be following up with them.

7. What to ask the MPP to do. This all depends as to what position your MPP has

- If your MPP is a government Cabinet Minister, ask them to bring up the problems/demands in the Cabinet meetings.
- If your MPP is a member of the government party, ask them to bring up the problems/demands during their caucus meetings.
- If your MPP is a member of the opposition party, ask them to bring up the problems/issues during Question period in the legislature. Ask your MPP to write a letter to the Ministry of Child, Community, and Social Services to support you and to request a response.

8. Follow-up

- Send a thank you letter to your MPP thanking them for taking the time to meet with you (refer to the template on page 10 of this document).
- Ensure that in your letter you highlight what you spoke about and what the MPP agreed to do for you.
- Call the MPP at a later date to see if the MPP followed through on any of the promises he/she made.

YOUR PERSONAL STORY

Your personal story should reflect a concrete real life example of the issue that you are speaking to. Politicians are constantly being bombarded with information that deals with policies, funding etc... We need the politicians to hear real life examples and how these problems are affecting your family directly. You need to keep the following things in mind:

- Tell them who you are, where you live
- Tell them the challenges you are facing.
Example: My son is 5 and has autism.
- Tell them how the challenges have affected your life.
Example: My son has severe tantrums. This means that we are unable to go out to public places as he has meltdowns.
- Keep your story simple. We understand that your child's situation may be complex. Try and keep your life story in a simplified version.
Example: "My son/daughter is currently 6 years old. He/she has been on the waiting list for 2 years and is now being told the funding he will receive will be limited due to this age. My son does not know how to interact with children, or communicate. We started private ABA and we noticed in two weeks that he was able to request his needs, but we couldn't afford to keep paying, etc...)"
- Provide very specific examples of how the problems are affecting your life.
Example: "My son needs an intensive ABA program to learn the skills he needs to be more independent and successful. The amount you offer families does not begin to cover the amount needed to do this and we will have to continue providing this therapy to our son at our own cost. We have already refinanced our house and have liquidated all of our assets including our RRSPs."

WRITING A LETTER TO YOUR MPP

General Guidelines:

Writing to your MPP about the issue that you have first-hand experience with can have a positive effect on your MPP. Discuss in your letter your experience with the Ontario Autism Program, how the Ontario Autism Program has failed your child, will prevent your child from reaching their full potential, etc. Tell them what you think a viable solution is. Keep your letter brief. Do not go beyond two pages, otherwise they are less likely to read your letter. Please note that the sample below is just a suggestion. You can modify it as you see fit.

These letters can be mailed, faxed or sent via email.

LETTER TO YOUR MPP

DATE

YOUR NAME

YOUR ADDRESS

NAME OF MPP/PARTY LEADER

ADDRESS

Re: Meeting request from **YOUR NAME**

Dear **MPP FIRST NAME LAST NAME**,

As a constituent in your riding, I am writing today to express my concerns with respect to the government's recent announcement of the Ontario Autism Program.

As you are aware, Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder, which affects 1/66 children. Autism affects a child's ability to communicate, and socially interact with their environment. Without appropriate intervention, these children will grow into adults and be unable to become contributing members of society, costing taxpayers upwards of \$2.5 million dollars to support these individuals throughout their lifespan.

We know that Autism is treatable using the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and has a long history of effectiveness.

[INSERT YOUR PERSONAL STORY HERE]

The government's proposed changes to the Ontario Autism Program are devastating to children with Autism in Ontario. Children with autism need access to the appropriate intervention at the right time and with the appropriate intensity.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss these issues and ways in which we can work collaboratively to ensure that children with Autism receive the appropriate customized and intensive intervention they require regardless of age.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO YOUR MPP

DATE

YOUR NAME

YOUR ADDRESS

NAME OF MPP/PARTY LEADER

ADDRESS

Re: Meeting request from **YOUR NAME**

Dear **MPP FIRST NAME LAST NAME,**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you on **DATE OF MEETING**. I appreciate your interest in the issues identified and your commitment to improve the quality of life for children with Autism.

I commend your recognition that/of **INSERT ISSUES THAT WERE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING**.

Your commitment to **INSERT WHAT THE MPP PROMISED TO DO** is appreciated.

I look forward to working with you during your term. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at **MY TELEPHONE NUMBER**.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

MPP MEETING REPORT FORM

Name of MPP or Cabinet Minister:

Constituency/Riding:

Date of Meeting:

Members Present on behalf of the constituents:

Members Present from the Government:

Main points you and MPP spoke about:

What was your MPP's response to the key messages demands?

What actions is s/he willing to take?

Is any follow-up necessary? (Further information, another meeting, etc)

Any additional comments?

OAC PRESS RELEASE

Media Release
For Immediate Release
February 6, 2019

Ford Government's One-Size-Fits-All Approach Fails All Children with Autism

Families who have children and youth with autism, and those who support them, are mobilizing to pressure the Ford government to reverse changes to the Ontario Autism Program that were announced today by the Hon. Lisa MacLeod.

The [Ontario Autism Coalition](#) (OAC) and the broader autism community are furious at the Ontario government's move to a flat-rate amount of funding for every child instead of funding based on individual need. One result of this change will be that children with higher needs will no longer receive adequate funding for life-changing Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) at the high intensity level they require. Children at the mild end of the spectrum may receive more funding than is needed. Both scenarios are an irresponsible use of taxpayers' dollars.

Equally disastrous is the government's reinstatement of an age cutoff for funding levels, with older children receiving significantly less than younger children. The OAC fought age cutoffs twice under previous Liberal governments, with Conservatives' endorsement. It defies reason that this government would choose to roll the clock back to a time when a birthday was believed to affect a child's level of need, only a year after they argued as the official opposition party that this logic is flawed and harmful to families.

Autism is a spectrum made up of diverse individuals with diverse needs. Allocating a uniform amount of money to everyone in the program, regardless of needs, may sound like equality, but it ignores the importance of equity. Some children may require significantly more therapy in order to make gains, while others may need much less.

The OAC calls on the Ontario government to slow down, and consult with experts, advocates and families at all stages of service, to come up with [better solutions](#), before ploughing ahead with a rushed program that will only hurt the very children and families it is supposedly designed to help.

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For more information:

Laura Kirby McIntosh, President (English and French) - 416-315-7939

Marguerite Schabas, Secretary-Treasurer (English and French) - 416-545-9160

Christine Levesque, Director - Special Operations (English and French) - 905-325-8420

Sarah Klodnicki, Director - Special Operations (English only) - 905-746-6371

The OAC is a province-wide organization that advocates for Ontario's autism community.

ACRONYMS INFO SHEET

ACRONYM	MEANING
OAC	Ontario Autism Coalition
OAP	Ontario Autism Program
AIP	Autism Intervention Program (the pre-2017 program)
DFO	Direct Funding Option (under the OAP)
DSO	Direct Service Option (under the OAP) but can also mean Developmental Services Ontario
ABA	Applied Behaviour Analysis Focused interventions: Target a specific skill deficit and/or one or more behavioural excesses; interventions are usually time-limited and implemented until goal is achieved (OSETT-ASD, 2017). Comprehensive interventions: Include essential practice elements of ABA and typically implemented in a very intensive and comprehensive manner (OSETT-ASD, 2017).
IBI	Intensive Behavioural Intervention (Ontario term previously used to describe services in the AIP – also known as comprehensive ABA)
BACB	Behavior Analyst Certification Board
BCBA	Board Certified Behaviour Analyst
RBT	Registered Behaviour Therapist
CIC	Clinician in Charge
ST	Senior Therapist (supervises & trains ITs - must be supervised by a Clinical Supervisor)
IT	Instructor Therapist (works directly with the client and must be supervised by a Senior Therapist and/or Clinical Supervisor – also known as an ABA Therapist)
BIP or BSP	Behaviour Intervention Plan/Program (may also be BSP)
FSP	Behaviour Support Plan/Program Family Service Plan—an optional plan for integrating OAP services with other services that the family needs. Regional providers are making it a requirement
ISP	Individual Service Plan/Individual Support Plan - under the OAP, this may be the Behaviour Plan and it outlines the goals to be achieved and the interventions to be used to attain those goals (a new one should be developed minimally every 6 months)
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IPRC	Identification, Placement and Review Committee
EA	Educational Assistant (in some boards may be called ERW or TA)
DTC	Disability Tax Credit
ACSD	Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities
ODSP	Ontario Disability Support Program
RDSP	Registered Disability Savings Plan
SSAH	Special Services at Home