

**Ministry of Children
and Youth Services**

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June 22, 2017

Dear parents, families and caregivers in our autism community:

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of announcing a sweeping transformation to how this province provides services and supports for children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP). This transformation will make Ontario a leader in this country, and around the world for autism services and support.

As we begin implementing the OAP, I want to make sure all of you have the information you need for the transition to go as smoothly as possible. If you have any questions or would like more information, I invite you to visit ontario.ca/autism.

Implementation of the new program will begin on June 26 and will continue until the OAP is fully implemented over the next year. We are doing this incrementally because we want the program to succeed. We need to do this right for you and for your children. I want you to have confidence that the new Ontario Autism Program puts the needs of children, youth, and families first.

As we work towards fully implementing the new Ontario Autism Program across our province, I have insisted our work be built on three guiding principles: choice, consistency, and confidence.

I want to be clear: all children and youth up to the age of 18 who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder from a qualified professional, will be eligible for the new OAP. This means we are not imposing parameters on the number of hours a child receives or the duration of their intervention. The new program is family-centred and services will be flexible, relevant and responsive to the needs of individual children and youth with autism, regardless of age.

I also want to reassure everyone waiting for service that your spot on the waitlist will not be compromised. We are working to decrease wait times as quickly as possible and create thousands of new spaces over the next four years.

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After hearing from many of you how difficult it can be to navigate supports and services when you have a child or youth with ASD, I am excited to share with you that there will be a single point of access to the new OAP. This means, starting June 26, you and your family will be able to call a number in each of the nine service areas across our province to access information and services. Please visit ontario.ca/autism for the toll free number for your OAP single point of access.

Beyond this, once fully implemented, each family will have an OAP Family Support Worker to help you navigate the OAP; an OAP Family Service Plan that is flexible and catered to your child's goals, needs, and changing development; as well as an OAP Family Team, if you want one, to promote partnerships with other professionals working with you and your child.

Delivering the best services for children with autism means that we must pay attention to the quality, accountability, and regulatory oversight of the services being provided in the new OAP. There will be a permanent direct funding option in the new program by the end of the year and whether you choose direct funding, or direct service, I want you to be confident that your child is receiving the highest quality of care. This is why I have directed the ministry to work towards establishing strong oversight of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) services to achieve this goal. We are already working with our partners at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to work through options to ensure we have strong accountability mechanisms in place.

I am committed to keeping an open door and working with you as we move forward with these changes. I am going to continue to engage with families, caregivers, advocates, clinicians and providers on the design and implementation of the new OAP. I invite any of you who would like to share your experiences and hear the experiences of other families across Ontario to join my tele-town halls this summer. The first session is on June 27, at 8:00 p.m. If you are unable to join at this time, we will host more sessions in the coming months, and our website will be continuously updated with additional information. More information about the tele-town hall can be found in the "In the News" section at ontario.ca/autism.

At the end of the day, children and youth are the most important individuals in any conversation we have about Autism Spectrum Disorder. I look forward to working with you as we implement this program to ensure it is something we can be proud of for years to come, and as a result, make a difference in the lives of children and youth with autism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Coteau', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Coteau
Minister