



Disability Policy  
Research Program

kids  
brain health  
network



réseau pour  
la santé du cerveau  
des enfants

# Disability Policy in Canada: Provincial and Territorial Report

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Prepared by: Brittany Finlay, Samuel Ragot, Lucyna M. Lach, and  
Jennifer D. Zwicker

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Disability Policy in Canada Provincial and Territorial Report was commissioned by Kids Brain Health Network (KBHN), and developed in collaboration with researchers from the Disability Policy Research Program (DiPo) and McGill University. The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of disability policy across Canadian provinces and territories. This report can serve as a baseline against which future progress in policy changes can be assessed, or at least understood.

In this report series, we aim to be as comprehensive as possible by including all policy related to persons with disabilities in each province and territory. We acknowledge that this report reflects a point in time assessment of disability policy. As such, information and links will likely change over time as governments and policy change. All information included in this report is accurate as of the date of publication. To maximize the accuracy of this report, it has been reviewed and verified by individuals with expertise in and/or lived experience with disability policy across Canada.

In an effort to be comprehensive while also succinct, we chose to apply a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria to the disability policy tools included in this report. The focus in this report series is to include legislation, plans of action, advocacy/awareness initiatives, tax programs, and services that support children and adults who have disabilities that are permanent and present from birth or that develop in early childhood. This includes neurodevelopmental disabilities and physical disabilities, deafness and hearing impairments, and blindness and vision impairment. We do not include policy tools that exclusively provide support to individuals that develop disabilities later in life, for example due to accidents or workplace injury. In some cases, there are policy tools that are accessible to all citizens and so are not explicitly designed for persons with disabilities and their families. We refer to these programs as 'blended' and include them in our analysis as they may be relevant to persons with disabilities and/or have unique

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

eligibility criteria for them. This is particularly important in provinces and territories that do not have policy tools and programs specifically designed for persons with disabilities to highlight other avenues through which they can receive support.

We chose to focus this report on children and adults with disabilities, and do not include programs that support seniors (65 years of age or older) with disabilities. The caveat to this is that we do include programs that support seniors if they also support adults under the age of 65 years with disabilities. This report is also focused on current government-funded or administered programs. We include some non-profit and community organizations that administer programs on behalf of government, but acknowledge that there are many more that we do not mention that are instrumental to the provision of support for individuals with disabilities across the country.

With respect to education, this report includes legislation and government directives relating to inclusive education, as well as outlines the bodies that are responsible for administering inclusive education, when available. We also include specific government funding streams or government-funded programs that support inclusive education. We do not include specific programs administered by school boards or other entities.

## **Measuring Up**

In this report, we provide information about the experiences of parents and caregivers when applying for and accessing disability programs, as well as information that emerged during the research process or from our peer reviewers. This information is provided in “Measuring Up” boxes throughout the report. Our intent in including this information is to provide additional context regarding the realities of accessing the policy tools outlined in this report and to give a voice to those with lived experience. It is important to note that these perspectives reflect opinions and experiences of a select group of individuals and may not align with the experiences of all individuals within a given province or territory.

Parent and caregiver experiences were sourced from a study completed by our team, which involved conducting an online survey and follow-up interviews with participants across Canada. We provide more information about the individuals we spoke with during this study on the following page.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

**499** Survey Participants **81** Interview Participants

English Speakers: 93%  
French Speakers: 7%

**14%** Spoke more than one language in their home

Average age: 42 years  
Range: 22-70 years

Average age: 11 years  
Range: 0-30 years

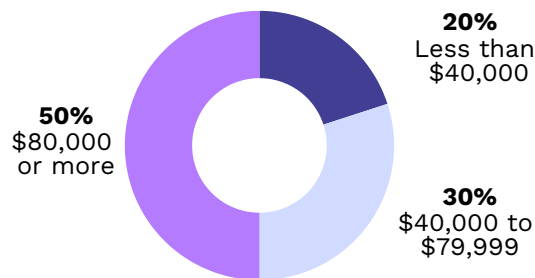
Males: 8%  
Females: 91%  
Non-binary: 1%

Males: 68%  
Females: 31%  
Non-binary or other: 1%

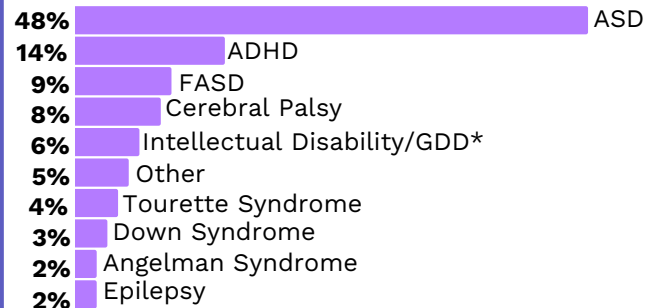
Participants

Youth

## Household Income



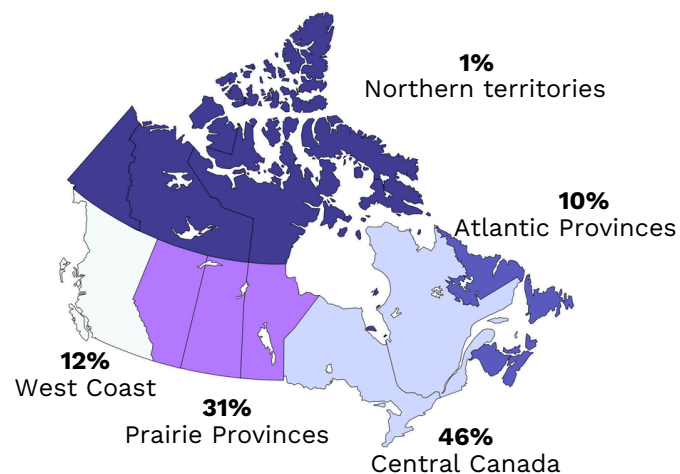
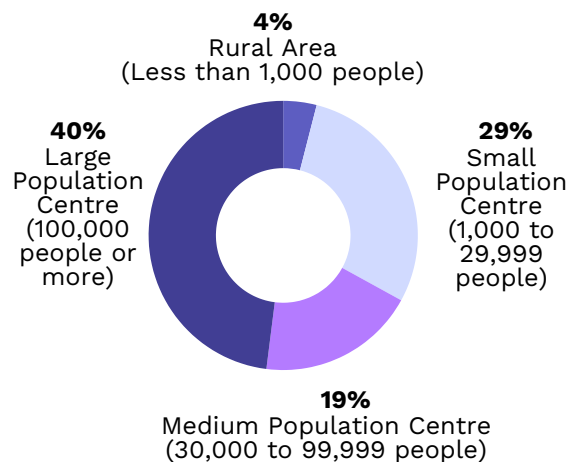
## Primary Diagnosis



**40%** Have more than one diagnosis

\*GDD = Global Developmental Delay

## Location



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all of the families that shared their experiences with our team and all of the community peer reviewers that provided insightful feedback on this report. The creation of this report would not have been possible without their contributions.

## **Peer Reviewers**

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- Philip Ney, Inclusion Alberta
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- Leanne Fenez, Abilities Manitoba
- Ken Pike, Inclusion New Brunswick
- Haley Flaro, Ability New Brunswick
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- Haley Jones, parent and advocate
- Marli Robertson, parent and advocate

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# BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY POLICY

“Public policy can be generally defined as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given topic promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives.”

*-Kilpatrick, 2016*

“A set of interrelated decision taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where these decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve”

*-Jenkins, 1978*

### **What is Disability Policy?**

There are many different ways to conceptualize and define public policy, and by extension, disability policy. For the purposes of this report, disability policy is broadly defined as what governments and other decision-making entities chose to do or not do that impacts persons with disabilities and their families.

### **Provincial and Territorial Disability Policy**

In Canada, disability policy is delivered by all levels of government in many different sectors, including health, education, finance, and social services. Our previous [report](#) provides an overview of disability policy at the federal level in Canada. This report series focuses on disability policy provided by provincial and territorial governments. For the purposes of this report, we provide information about disability policy for all provinces and territories in alignment with the following five categories:

1) [Income Supports](#) are programs that provide financial assistance to individuals with a low-income so they are able to afford basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, and other daily needs. Persons with disabilities in Canada at a lower income level or who experience barriers to employment can access financial assistance from income support programs. Some provinces and territories provide income support programs specifically designed for persons with disabilities, while others provide an additional allowance for persons with disabilities within their general income support program. Others still offer one income support program that all individuals with a low income who meet eligibility criteria can access, with no additional supports for persons with disabilities, specifically.

2) Laws and Policies include laws and policy documents that allow systems to be put in place to help governments carry out changes they want to make to systems and structures. Laws are created from bills that are introduced in the provincial or territorial legislature. To become law, bills must pass through a specific legislative process. Policy documents are often published by ministries and can provide guidelines with respect to a specific topic. Legislation may stipulate that ministers can publish policy documents related to the topic of the piece of legislation (for example, education-related legislation often gives ministers the power to publish policy guidelines related to inclusive education).

3) Advocacy, Awareness, and Action Plans include councils, offices or events funded by provincial and territorial governments that can serve a variety of purposes, such as advocating to government on behalf of individuals with disabilities, advising on the development of government programs or policies, connecting individuals with disabilities with programs in their community, awareness building and education, support for mistreatment and discrimination, and, in some cases, direct service provision. This category also includes provincial and territorial action plans related to persons with disabilities that outline policy priorities and recommendations for government action.

4) Programs Provided through the Tax System include refundable and non-refundable tax credits, as well as tax deductions, that aim to offset the additional costs associated with having a disability by reducing the amount of income taxes an individual owes each year. Non-refundable tax credits reduce the amount of income tax owed but do not produce a tax refund if the amount of the credit exceeds the income tax owed, whereas refundable tax credits reduce the amount of tax owed and will create a tax refund if the amount of the credit exceeds the income tax owed. Tax deductions allow for certain expenses to be deducted from taxable income to lower the amount of taxes owed. In Canada, provincial and territorial governments develop their own tax law and policies; however, the Canada Revenue Agency collects and administers individual income taxes on behalf of provincial and territorial governments (except for the province of Quebec, where taxes are administered by Revenu Quebec).

5) Services and Supports for Basic Needs and Activities of Daily Living are services, supports, and programs that provide assistance to persons with disabilities in their day-to-day lives. This can include community-based support, employment programs, home and housing support, respite, early intervention, transportation support, and rehabilitation, among others. For each province and territory, we provide sub-categories within this section for added clarity.

### **Disability Policy Outside Government**

In many provinces and territories, disability policy is delivered by entities outside of government, such as Crown Corporations, non-profit organizations and registered charities. In some cases, these organizations are funded and/or contracted by the provincial or territorial government to provide these services. We specify these cases whenever possible throughout the report. We also provide a list of these organizations at the end of the section on each province and territory as a resource for individuals and families looking for support.

# UN CRPD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is an international treaty that upholds and protects the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide. Canada, along with 183 other states parties, has adopted the UN CRPD, which means that they accept the legal obligations contained in the UN CRPD. These obligations include ensuring that there are national laws to prevent discrimination, eliminating barriers to accessibility, and working to promote the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities. Associated with the creation of laws are the provision of disability programs that have the purpose of providing support to persons with disabilities to ensure they are able to fully participate in society.

Contained in the UN CRPD are processes that help to ensure that states parties are meeting the obligations outlined in the UN CRPD. For example, states parties must regularly report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to explain what actions they are taking to implement the UN CRPD. In Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Commission is also tasked with monitoring how well Canada is implementing the obligations outlined in the UN CRPD.

Canada and 99 other states parties have also signed on to the Optional Protocol to the UN CRPD. The Optional Protocol creates a process for people to make complaints directly to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities if they have exhausted all other legal options within Canada.

While the UN CRPD is ratified federally, many of the obligations contained in the UN CRPD can be met by policy and programs delivered at the provincial and territorial level. In fact, due to the federalist nature of Canada, many articles, such as Health (Article 25), Habilitation and Rehabilitation (Article 26), and Education (Article 24) are met to a greater extent by programs provided by provincial and territorial governments, rather than the federal government.

To demonstrate how government actions can fulfill requirements under the UN CRPD, we link UN CRPD articles with the various disability policy tools we include in this report. For the purposes of this report, we have sorted the 50 articles of the UN CRPD with similar aims into 10 categories (outlined below). Articles that are not included in this report are administrative in nature, related to reporting requirements, or are outside the scope of government action in this context. The icons used on the following pages will be used throughout the report to demonstrate how provincial and territorial disability policy is aligned with the UN CRPD articles.





## Equality

### Description

This category includes articles that promote equality for persons with disabilities both before and under the law, and ensure that persons with disabilities do not face discrimination.

### Relevant Articles

Article 4: General obligations

Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination

Article 6: Children with disabilities

Article 7: Women with disabilities

Article 10: Right to life

Article 14: Liberty and security of person

Article 17: Protecting the integrity of the person

Article 22: Respect for privacy



## Accessibility

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities can access public spaces, systems, and facilities, such as the physical environment, transportation and communication technologies.

### Relevant Article

Article 9 – Accessibility



## Social Participation

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate in society fully and on an equal basis with others.

### Relevant Articles

Article 18: Liberty of movement and nationality

Article 20: Personal mobility

Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

Article 29: Participation in political and public life

Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport



## Employment and Financial Security

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to work, and have access to inclusive and accessible workplaces. It also includes articles that outline the responsibility of states parties to alleviate poverty and promote financial security of persons with disabilities.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 27](#): Work and employment

[Article 28](#): Adequate standard of living and social protection



## Health and Social Services

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to healthcare and social services that allows them to have the highest attainable standard of health and well-being, achieve inclusion and maintain maximum independence.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 25](#): Health

[Article 26](#): Habilitation and rehabilitation



## Public Education and Information

### Description

This category includes articles that require states parties to provide public information about persons with disabilities to foster respect and combat stereotypes.

### Relevant Article

[Article 8](#): Awareness-raising



## Legal Capacity and Justice

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure persons with disabilities have equality with respect to legal capacity and access to justice.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 12](#): Equal recognition before the law

[Article 13](#): Access to justice



## Caregiving and Family

### Description

This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 23](#): Respect for home and the family



## Education

### Description

This category includes articles that maintain the right to education for persons with disabilities through the provision of inclusive and quality education, accommodations, and support.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 24](#): Education



## Housing and Related Supports

### Description





This category includes articles that ensure that persons with disabilities have equality in their ability to choose where they would like to live and are able to live as independently as possible in the community through the provision of in-home and community supports.

### Relevant Articles

[Article 19](#): Living independently and being included in the community

# ONTARIO

## PROGRAMS AT A GLANCE

Income Support 	
Disability-Specific	Blended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)</li> </ul>	
Laws and Policies 	
Disability-Specific	Blended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ontario Human Rights Code</li> <li>Education Act</li> <li>Special Education Policy and Program Memorandum</li> <li>Substitute Decisions Act</li> <li>Health Care Consent Act</li> </ul>
Advocacy, Awareness and Action Plans 	
Disability-Specific	Blended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan</li> <li>Accessibility Compliance Action Plan</li> <li>An Accessible Ontario</li> <li>Disability Employment Awareness Month</li> <li>United Nations' International Day of Persons with Disabilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ontario Human Rights Commission</li> <li>Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario</li> <li>Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario</li> <li>Ontario Ombudsman</li> <li>Patient Ombudsman</li> <li>Social Benefits Tribunal</li> </ul>
Programs Provided by the Tax System 	
Disability-Specific	Blended
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability amount for self</li> <li>Disability amount transferred from a dependent</li> <li>Amount for infirm dependents age 18 or older</li> <li>Ontario caregiver amount</li> <li>Reduction for dependents with a mental or physical impairment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medical expenses for self, spouse or common-law partner and your dependent children</li> <li>Allowable amount of medical expenses for other dependents</li> </ul>

## Services and Supports for Activities of Daily Living



### Disability-Specific

- Infant Child Development Program
- Preschool Speech and Language Program
- Infant Hearing Program
- Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention program
- Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD)
- Children’s Treatment Centres and Surrey Place in Toronto
- Ontario Autism Program
- Special Services at Home (SSAH) program
- Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children Program
- Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) – includes:
  - Passport Program
  - Housing Supports
  - Community Networks of Specialized Care (referral needed)
- Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD)
- Ontario Home & Vehicle Modification Program




### Blended

- Assistive Devices Program
- Home and Community Care Support Services
- Trillium Drug Program
- Long-term care
- Accessible Parking Permits

## ACRONYMS

ACSD	Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities
AODA	Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
APSW	Adult protective service workers
BSWD	Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities
CPD	Council for Persons with Disabilities
CWDO	Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario
DSO	Developmental Services Ontario
MCCSS	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
OADD	Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities
ODSP	Ontario Disability Support Program
OSAP	Ontario Student Assistance Program
SSAH	Special Services at Home

# INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAMS

 Employment & Financial Security  Health & Social Services  Equality  
 Social Participation

At the age of 18 years, the key financial and employment support program for persons with disabilities is the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). The ODSP is an income-dependent support for those who qualify. Determining eligibility for the ODSP is contingent on the following (and in this order):

- Age - Applicants must be at least 18 years of age, although individuals are able and recommended to start applying at age 17.5 years.
- Residency - Applicants must be an Ontario resident.
- Finances - Applicants must have demonstrated financial need.
- Disability - Applicants must meet criteria for being a person with a disability or demonstrate membership in the prescribed class.

To demonstrate financial need, household expenses must exceed income. If the person with a disability is living with their parent(s), parental income information is gathered, but is not considered when determining eligibility.






To be considered a person with a disability, the following criteria must be met:

- The applicant must have a substantial mental or physical impairment that is continuous or recurrent, and it is expected to last one year or more.
- The applicant's impairment must directly result in a substantial restriction in their ability to work, care for themselves, or take part in community life.
- The impairment, its duration, and restrictions have been verified by an approved health care professional.

The amount that a person with a disability will receive depends on several factors: who they are living with (e.g., living with their parents vs. renting or owning their own home), whether they have dependents, income from other sources, and assets. If the person with a disability is living with their parent(s), they will receive between \$1108 and \$1308 per month. If the person with a disability is also employed, they are only able to earn \$200 per month before ODSP benefits are clawed back.

Once eligibility for ODSP is established, persons with disabilities are eligible for prescription drug (through the Ontario Drug Benefit Program), dental, and vision care coverage. They are also eligible to receive 75 percent coverage of equipment, such as feeding tubes and mobility aids, among others, from the Assistive Devices Program (see more below). Employment supports such as job coaching, assistance with locating and keeping a job, or interpreter services are also available through an ODSP community service provider.

# LAWS AND POLICIES

 Equality  Legal Capacity & Justice  Accessibility  Social Participation  
 Public Education & Information

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) became law in June 2005, and applies to all levels of government, non-profit organizations, and private sector businesses in Ontario that have one or more employees (full-time, part-time, seasonal, or contract). It sets out specific standards that address employment, information and communication, transportation, customer service, and the design of public space. Health care and education standards are still under construction at the time of publication.

The following pieces of legislation include information that mentions or is relevant to persons with disabilities in Ontario:

- The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits actions that discriminate against people based on a protected ground (which includes disability, among others) in a protected social area (which includes housing, contracts, employment, goods, services, facilities, and membership in unions, trade or professional associations). “Disability” covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and some not visible. A disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time.
- The Education Act (and amendments relating to special education) in Ontario has regulations that specify what each school board must have in place to address the special education needs of children and youth with disabilities. Among these regulations is the requirement for School Boards to have a mechanism for identifying, placing, and reviewing the performance of students with disabilities, the parameters of an individualized education plan for students with disabilities, how special education programs and services will be delivered, and procedures for addressing the needs of blind and deaf students. There are also a number of Policy and Program Memorandum that relate to special education, such as Policy/Program Memorandum 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities and Policy/Program Memorandum 140: Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).
- If there is some question about capacity of an adult (anyone who is 18 years of age and older), the Substitute Decisions Act is the guiding legislation that establishes rules for who can be a substitute decision maker, what the substitute decision maker has authority over, and how that authority can be established. It works together with the Health Care Consent Act, which sets the rules for determining capacity and substitute consent related to treatment decisions, admission to long-term care facilities, and assistance with activities of daily living.



## MEASURING UP: DISABILITY POLICY IN ACTION

### Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Review

As part of the implementation of the AODA, the Government of Ontario is required to appoint an expert to conduct a review of the AODA to assess its effectiveness. The review process involves consultations with the public, including persons with disabilities and other stakeholders. The most recent review was published in 2023 and deemed the AODA to be a “failure” and “missed opportunity.” The report included five key themes from consultation feedback, which we summarize below.



#### Outcomes are Poor

There is a near unanimous consensus that the AODA is currently failing persons with disabilities - experience design (physical and digital experiences of products and services) does not consider the functional needs of persons with disabilities, resulting in poorer experiences in sectors like health and education relative to peers.



#### Lack of Data and Research

AODA stakeholders noted that a lack of data creates difficulties in improving the experiences of persons with disabilities in Ontario.



#### Lack of Basic Leadership

Stakeholders noted that there is a lack of urgency on “getting accessibility right” within the Ontario government. Legislative and staff turnover have also created challenges in developing effective leadership on the issue.



#### Lack of Accountability

Consultations revealed that there is a lack of accountability for implementing the AODA within the private and public sector. There is also a lack of public knowledge of the AODA, making it difficult to hold organizations responsible for implementing the AODA.



#### Lack of Enforcement

There is a lack of meaningful enforcement of the AODA, due in part to the understaffing of the Compliance and Enforcement Branch of the AODA.

## ADVOCACY, AWARENESS, AND ACTION PLANS

Equality Public Education & Information Accessibility Social Participation  
 Health & Social Services Legal Capacity & Justice








The Government of Ontario does not have a body or office that relates specifically to accessibility or the rights of persons with disabilities. The AODA outlines the vision for an accessible Ontario by 2025. To this end, a number of action plans related to achieving this vision were published in 2015: The Path to 2025: Ontario's Accessibility Action Plan; Accessibility compliance action plan; and, An Accessible Ontario. At the time of publication, no more recent plans of action have been published.

Ontario recognizes Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. This month promotes the benefits of creating inclusive workplaces and hiring individuals with disabilities. The Government of Ontario also recognizes the United Nations' International Day of Persons with Disabilities annually on December 3. Recognizing this day is meant to bring awareness to issues that impact people with disabilities and highlight the ways the Government of Ontario is creating a more accessible and inclusive Ontario.

Offices in Ontario that relate to persons with disabilities include the following:

- The Ontario Human Rights Commission is an arm's length agency of the government that protects human rights and aims to prevent discrimination.
- The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario accepts discrimination and harassment complaints.
- The Human Rights Legal Support Centre provides legal advice or assistance with respect to matters covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario addresses issues that arise related to access to confidential information. There are rules that govern how Ontario's public institutions, health care providers, children's aid societies, and other child and family service providers may collect, use, and disclose personal information. They also provide the public with the right to access government-held information and access to their own personal information while ensuring that any personal information held by public institutions, health care providers, and child and family service providers remains private and secure.
- The Ontario Ombudsman investigates complaints that involve Ontario government organizations and municipalities, universities, and school boards, as well as French language services and child protection services. They have the right to investigate and in doing so, help complainants navigate and resolve challenging issues that take place in these settings. They will respond to individual issues and more systemic ones.
- The Patient Ombudsman accepts complaints about hospitals and long-term care homes. These complaints only go to the Ontario Ombudsman if the Patient Ombudsman's office is not able to resolve them, or if there are systemic issues in these settings.
- The Social Benefits Tribunal hears appeals from people who have either been refused social assistance or who receive social assistance but disagree with a decision that affects their eligibility for assistance, the amount of assistance they receive, and the benefits they receive.

# PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY THE TAX SYSTEM

 Equality
  Caregiving & Family
  Health & Social Services
  Social Participation  
 Employment & Financial Security

Outlined below are the tax-related programs provided by the Government of Ontario that are available to individuals with disabilities and their families. More information about all Ontario taxes for the 2023 tax year can be found [here](#). All dollar amounts provided in this section are accurate for the 2023 tax year.

Tax Credit	Description and Eligibility
<b>Disability amount for self</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduces tax payable for persons with disabilities.</li> <li>Individuals can claim this on their taxes if they have been approved for the federal Disability Tax Credit.</li> <li>Adults 18 years of age or older can claim \$9,586 on their tax return.</li> </ul>
<b>Disability amount transferred from a dependent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals can claim this on their taxes if their dependent has been approved for the federal Disability Tax Credit and does not need to claim all or part of the disability amount on their tax return.</li> </ul>
<b>Amount for infirm dependents age 18 and older</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This amount (up to \$2,798 for each dependent) can be claimed for dependents over the age of 17 years with an impairment in physical or mental functions.</li> <li>The dependent must have a net income under \$8,481.</li> </ul>
<b>Medical expenses for self, spouse or common-law partner and your dependent children born in 2006 or later</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals can claim the same medical expenses on their provincial tax return that they claimed through the federal medical expenses tax credit.</li> <li>Dependents must be under the age of 18 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Allowable amount of medical expenses for other dependents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals can claim the same medical expenses on their provincial tax return that they claimed through the federal medical expenses tax credit for their other dependents 18 years of age or older.</li> <li>Individuals can claim a maximum of \$14,476 for each dependent.</li> </ul>
<b>Ontario caregiver amount</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals caring for an eligible relative over the age of 17 years with a net income under \$24,726 and with an impairment in physical or mental functions can claim this amount (up to \$5,593 per dependent).</li> </ul>

### Reduction for dependents with a mental or physical impairment

- Parents can claim a reduction of \$506 on their tax return for each of their children under the age of 19 years with a mental or physical impairment.

## SERVICES AND SUPPORTS



### Early Childhood Programs

Families that have concerns about their child’s early development can access many programs before their child enters school.

The Infant Child Development Program, which provides home-based intervention support for children with a developmental disability or at risk of developmental delay, is funded by the Government of Ontario and delivered by community-based agencies. Examples of services provided by this program include assessments, early intervention, information, parenting support, and collaborative provision of support with local providers.

Families concerned about their child’s speech or language development can access the Preschool Speech and Language Program, through which speech-language pathologists assess children and provide support for their speech and language development. Support can be provided through parent education workshops, small group sessions, consultations, and home programs.

The Infant Hearing Program provides hearing screening for all newborns, assessments to identify permanent hearing loss, monitoring of children at risk of developing hearing loss, and language development services.

Finally, the Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention program is available to provide support to families with children who have a visual impairment from birth to



### Did you know?

In 2022, the Ontario Government created 22 SmartStart Hubs across the province as a point of entry for families with concerns about their child’s development. These Hubs are located within Children’s Treatment Centres (and Surrey Place in Toronto) and bring together local professionals in early intervention and child development services to help connect families to local services based on their child’s needs.

school entry, both in the home and in the community. Supports provided by this program include family support from social workers, and intervention services and consultation services from specially trained early childhood vision consultants. These programs can be accessed without a referral from a doctor or a formal diagnosis.

## Programs for Children

The main program for families who have a child with a disability in Ontario is the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD) program, which provides financial support to families with a child with a severe disability under the age of 18 years. This is an income-based program, which means that total household income must be \$74,760 or less to be eligible for the program. The amount that families are eligible to receive ranges from \$25 to \$618 per month and is contingent on the size of the family, the severity of the child's disability, and the nature of the extraordinary costs related to the child's disability. Extraordinary costs may include respite, transportation costs to attend doctor's appointments, and specialized clothing or shoes. If eligible for the ACSD program, children may also receive coverage for specialized equipment or supplies (not covered by other programs such as the Assistive Device Program – see more below), prescription drug coverage, dental care (children in this program are automatically enrolled in Healthy Smiles Ontario), hearing aids and vision care, and batteries and repairs for mobility devices.

Children and youth with a physical disability, developmental disability or communication difficulties/disorders under the age of 19 years (or 21 years if they are in school) can access rehabilitation services through Children's Treatment Centres and Surrey Place in Toronto. Through these treatment centres, children and families can access physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy.

The Ontario Autism Program provides support to children under the age of 18 years that have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Services provided by this program include parent and caregiver education and mentoring, early years play-based programs (available from 12 months to four years of age), clinical services (such as applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, mental health services, and technology), the entry to school program, and urgent response services.

Funding to cover the cost of respite for families with a child with a disability are provided by three programs: ACSD, the Special Services at Home (SSAH) program and the Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children Program.

SSAH program funding can be used to pay for both in-home or out-of-home respite expenses. Unlike the ACSD program, the SSAH program is not income dependent. Eligibility criteria require caregivers to have a child with a developmental and/or physical disability who lives with them in Ontario, is



## MEASURING UP: DISABILITY POLICY IN ACTION

### Parent Experiences: Barriers to Access

In Ontario, 177 parents and caregivers completed our online survey and 13 parents and caregivers participated in an in-depth, follow-up interview. When asked about their experiences accessing programs disability programs, two main barriers to access emerged across participants. We describe the first main barrier below.



#### Complex and Lengthy Application Process

Many participants shared that the application processes for Ontario disability programs were time-consuming and involved a large amount of paperwork that needed to be filled out with the support of program staff and medical professionals. Many participants also shared how emotionally taxing it was to have to continually repeat their child's deficits in order to receive needed support from multiple programs.

*"I had somebody refer me, then I had somebody come to my house and talk to me about it, then they had to come back a second time, then they had to bring somebody else with them to say yeah, okay, you're qualified, then somebody came here yesterday and spent two hours reading the paperwork that I had read to make sure I understood, then she has to go back and send it to somebody who has to then send an email, who has to then come and see me again, then I have to have another person come in and give me all the documentation for how I have to fill it out to make sure that I'm on time, and then after that back to the manager, then she releases the money to me and then I can get start getting extra services. Like, it's surreal."*

*"The paperwork is long and complicated. It is both technically specifically but also emotionally taxing to fill out, because you have to be very honest about the hardest parts of your life and your child's life - the parts you mostly try to ignore. The fact that you have to fill out answers to basically the same questions over and over and over again for each source of funding is also difficult."*

**82%**

*of survey participants experienced some level of difficulty applying for disability programs, with over half finding the process of applying to be very difficult and challenging.*

under the age of 18 years, and who needs more support than caregivers can provide. Funding can be self-administered or administered by a specialized agency. The funding can also be used for items such as mainstream or specialized camps, support workers for personal development, routine

homemaking tasks, membership fees, nursing, and technology.

The Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children program provides families with up to \$4,130 per year to spend on respite. To be eligible for funding, the child must be under 18 years of age, live at home, need intensive care and constant monitoring on a 24-hour basis, and be medically fragile and/or technology dependent. The latter is specified by meeting any one of the following criteria:

- The child relies on medical and technological equipment, such as mechanical ventilators, apnea monitors, renal dialysis, urinary catheters, colostomy bags.
- The child is administered drugs intravenously.
- The child relies on tracheotomy tube care, suctioning, oxygen support, or tube feeding.

### Programs for Adults

Adults over the age of 17 years with developmental disabilities primarily receive support through Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), which is the access point for adult developmental services funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) in Ontario. There are nine DSO locations across the province that serve different counties and regions. Individuals can contact their local DSO office as early as age 16 years to begin the DSO application process, determine services and supports that align with their individual needs, and access these services and supports.

The main program provided by DSO is the Passport Program, which helps adults with a developmental disability be involved in their communities and live as independently as possible by providing funding for community participation services and supports, activities of daily living, and person-directed planning. The reimbursement program also provides funding for caregiver respite services and supports for primary caregivers of an adult with a developmental disability. Recipients are currently eligible for up to \$2,000 per year for social, leisure, and cultural activities, and up to \$3,000 per year for technology. The typical maximum a person with a disability can receive per year, across all categories of services and supports, is \$5,500. However, if the required services and supports exceed that amount, a special application process can be made to receive up to a maximum of \$44,275 per year. Categories of services and supports available through the Passport Program include the following:

- Community Participation Supports (e.g., membership fees to fitness centres and camps).
- Activities of Daily Living (e.g., programs, classes, and supports to learn life skills).
- Employment Supports (e.g., pre-employment skills development and training).
- Caregiver Respite (e.g., any time of day, in-home or out-of-home). Indirect respite expenses (e.g., short term arrangements for up to 6 months) may be considered for reimbursement with prior pre-approval and in extenuating circumstances.
- Support Worker Hours and Expenses (e.g., wage, benefits, and activity-related expenses).

- Transportation (to/from employment, community activities, or respite).
- Technology (e.g., laptops, internet provider fees, and cell phones).
- Community Participation Support Supplies and Equipment (e.g., fitness equipment, helmets, and arts and crafts supplies).
- Person-Directed Planning (helps people with a developmental disability prepare life plans that lay out their distinct needs and goals).
- Administrative Supports (e.g., bookkeeping, and bank fees).

DSO also provides housing supports, which are funded by MCCSS and provided by local agencies. These housing supports can include group homes, group living supports, supported independent living, and associate living support. Other professionals that provide support through DSO include the following:

- Adult protective service workers (APSW), who can help persons with disabilities and their caregivers learn about supports and services that are available to them and develop important life skills.
- Behavioural consultants, who can assist with the development of a behaviour support plan.
- Case managers, who work with families to support them in coordinating formal and informal services and supports that meet the goals of individuals and families (often on a short-term basis).

Additionally, DSO staff can refer individuals to the Community Networks of Specialized Care, which provides direct complex coordination to adults with developmental disabilities with high supports and complex care needs. This program brings together an interdisciplinary team to shed light on the various ways of understanding the presenting problem, and to come up with an integrated support plan for each individual. This program is particularly relevant for those who have a disability and co-morbid mental health issues, or for those with multiple and complex medical conditions.

## Education

Schools and school boards provide special education supports for children and youth in the K-12 system. The Ministry of Education sets standards for special education supports that all school boards are required to follow.

Full time and part time post-secondary students with disabilities can access the Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) to help them pay for eligible disability-related services and equipment needed to participate in their studies. The maximum funding an individual can receive through this bursary is \$2,000 per year, with eligible items subject to individual funding maximums. Information from a health care provider and/or from the school's office for students with disabilities or accessibility services office is used to determine what is eligible to be funded through this program. To be eligible for this program, students must be eligible for funding from Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) for full-time students, OSAP for part-time students, or an Institution-Funded Special Bursary.

## Housing and Transportation

Individuals that require modifications to their homes and/or vehicles can receive funding from the Ontario Home & Vehicle Modification Program. This program is funded by the Ontario Government Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility and administered by the March of Dimes. Through this program, individuals may receive up to \$15,000 (lifetime maximum) for home modifications, adaptations, and devices, and up to \$15,000 for vehicle modifications every 10 years.



## MEASURING UP: DISABILITY POLICY IN ACTION

### Parent Experiences: Barriers to Access

When participants were asked about their experiences accessing disability programs in Ontario, two main barriers to access emerged across participants. We describe the second main barrier below.



#### Long Waitlists Delay Access to Support

Nearly all interview participants and the majority of survey participants discussed delays in accessing disability programs in Ontario due to long waitlists. In some cases, participants spent years on waitlists for disability programs and, in some cases, participants aged out of programs before support was received. Many participants also shared that they did not always receive information about the status of their application, making it unclear when they will be able to start receiving needed support.

*“Special Services at Home waitlisted us and basically said there was nothing they could do. The wait for respite through regular channels in our area is 7-10 years.”*

*“We were on the waitlist for ADA programming. [My daughter] was diagnosed at two and a half [years] and she finally got funding when she was five [years].”*

Over **60,000** children are currently on the waitlist for the Ontario Autism Program, according to advocates.

### Blended Programs

Blended programs that may provide support to individuals with disabilities despite the fact that they are not specific to individuals with disabilities include the following:



- Assistive Devices Program. Provides financial assistance to help with the cost of equipment and supplies for individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions, including mobility aids such as wheelchairs.
- Home and Community Care Support Services. Funded by the Ministry of Health, this program provides nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and specialized services such as social work, nutrition, personal support services, and intravenous therapy at home.
- Trillium Drug Program. Provides support with the cost of prescription drugs for individuals with high prescription drug costs that are not currently receiving benefits from Ontario Works or ODSP.
- Long-term care. Long-term care facilities are residential options that provide help with most or all daily activities and provide access to around the clock nursing and personal care.
- Accessible Parking Permits. Individuals with an eligible health condition and authorization from a regulated healthcare professional can apply for an accessible parking permit that will allow them to park in designated stalls. Five types of permits are available: permanent permit, subject to change permit, temporary permit, traveler's permit, and company permit.



## Support for Individuals and Families

Those living in the Ottawa and Eastern regions can access support from Service Coordination Support, which helps individuals with a developmental disability or autism find available resources in their community.

Additionally, there are many non-profits, charities, and other organizations that advocate for and provide support to individuals in Ontario with disabilities and their families. A selection of these organizations include the following:

- Ability Online
- Autism Ontario
- Community Living Ontario
- ConnectABILITY.ca
- Canadian Hearing Services
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind
- Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD)
- Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario (CWDO)
- Council for Persons with Disabilities (CPD)
- Easter Seals Ontario
- March of Dimes Canada
- Voice for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Ontario Federation For Cerebral Palsy (OFCP)
- Ontario Para Network (ONPARA)