

**Ministry of Children
and Youth Services**

Minister's Office

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**Ministère des Services
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May 25, 2017

Dear service providers and frontline workers of our autism community:

Thank you for everything you do to support children, youth, parents and caregivers. You play a vital role in our autism community by ensuring the services children receive allow them to reach their full and unique potential.

In the time that I have been the Minister of Children and Youth Services, hundreds of parents and families from Ontario's autism community have shared their experiences with me. I am proud to see how far we have come in supporting families and their children by reducing wait times, and providing unparalleled investments to improve support and services. And, we are committed to doing more.

Preparing for a new Ontario Autism Program (OAP) has been challenging for many families as they await improvements to the programs and services their children receive. I know many of you have questions and want insight into the upcoming changes. I hear you, and am committed to keeping an open door. I know many families will come to you first with questions about the OAP and their needs are our shared top priority. Your involvement will be crucial to ensure a smooth implementation of the new OAP starting in June.

Last week, I announced there will be a direct funding option (DFO) in the new Ontario Autism Program before the end of this year. Parents currently receiving direct funding—either through the Autism Intervention Program DFO or \$8,000/\$10,000 payments—will continue to receive this funding until the new direct funding option is available. This means funding and services will not be disrupted in June. Families have conveyed how important it is to have choice when it comes to their services. I would like to have a fair and level playing field for all children and youth with autism receiving support.

I have asked the ministry and the OAP Advisory Committee to design and implement an approach to direct funding that is fair, transparent, and responds to family needs. As leaders and frontline staff, you will continue to play an important role in the delivery of autism services in Ontario. I want all families to receive high-quality, responsive services, and feel confident in their choice, whether they choose to receive services directly through our agencies or purchase privately through ministry direct funding.

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I know the importance of the relationships you have built with children, youth, families and their communities. All changes being made in the new OAP are guided by input from you, clinicians, experts, service providers, children, youth and families. The new program will help you better serve our autism community. We want to make sure you have the resources you need to support children and youth with autism when they need it, where they need it, and to the degree that meets each of their unique needs.

Thank you again for your commitment to providing high-quality, family-centred services to children and youth with autism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MC', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Michael Coteau
Minister