

FUNDING INCREASED FOR ABA/IBI INTERVENTION FOR ONTARIO PRESCHOOLERS WITH AUTISM

1. November 18, 2002

EVES GOVERNMENT MAKES LANDMARK INVESTMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH
AUTISM

MISSISSAUGA - The Ontario government is investing an additional \$58.6 million for services for children with autism, bringing the total commitment to almost \$100 million by 2006/07, Brenda Elliott, Ontario's Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services, announced today.

"Research tells us that Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) works best when provided to children at a young age," said Minister Elliott. "Ontario is a leader in autism services for children and we continue to demonstrate this by more than doubling our investment in this service for young children so that they can get the help they need."

Ontario's unprecedented commitment to providing IBI to young children with autism dates back to the 1999 Ontario Budget. In May 2001, the Ontario government doubled its commitment to \$39.3 million, as part of the Ontario Early Years Plan. Today's additional funding includes enhancements of \$39.6 million, bringing commitments for IBI to over \$78 million by 2006/07.

"We also recognize that families and children need help over the long-term," Minister Elliott said. "We will invest \$19 million in new programs and services for older children with autism so that they can grow and learn in their transition to school."

The government's new investments in IBI and new programs and services bring its commitment to helping children with autism and their families to almost \$100 million.

"We are so pleased that the Ontario government has yet again increased funding for autism services," said Linda Rothney, President and CEO of Erinoak, one of the nine service providers delivering IBI therapy in Ontario. "The additional money is welcome news. It means we can assist even more children with autism and their families."

New programs and services for older children include transition coordinators who will help families with the transition to alternative programs. Elementary school-age children will also have new out-of-class programs available to them that are focussed on developing and improving social interaction, behaviour and communication. Additionally, the Ministry of Education will pilot its Autism Program Standards in the 2003/04 school year and will host forums to help teachers learn about new approaches being used to educate children with autism.

The Ernie Eves government continues to be committed to children with autism through new and expanded services that will improve their lives and help parents raise their children with hope and dignity.

For more background on this announcement:

<http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS/page/news/news2002/nov1802b2.html>

<http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS/page/news/news2002/nov1802b.html>

2. CRITIQUE BY MP SHELLEY MARTEL November 18, 2002

TORIES DISCRIMINATE AGAINST AUTISTIC CHILDREN OVER 6

QUEEN'S PARK -- Not one cent will go to fund Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) treatment for autistic children over the age of six, NDP Health Critic Shelley Martel said following a sketchy Conservative government funding announcement about treating autism.

"It is unacceptable that this government continues to discriminate against autistic children over age six who need IBI treatment," Martel said.

Today's announcement is a slap in the face for families like Sheri and Leo Walsh, of Welland, who have exhausted their savings and are severely in debt trying to pay for IBI treatment for their autistic son, Cameron.

"We went to Queen's Park last month to tell the Minister we were being forced to sell our house to continue the IBI treatment our six-year-old son Cameron desperately needs," said parent Sheri Walsh. "I thought she might actually listen but today's announcement does nothing for Cameron or any of the hundreds of children like him."

The government estimates that the money announced today will provide IBI treatment for an additional 610 children under the age of six by 2007, but there are currently 900 children on the waiting list for treatment.

"With the dramatic increases in the diagnosis of autism the waiting list is likely to double by 2007," Martel said. "The inadequacy of the government's announcement means many children on the waiting list will never receive funding."

Despite IBI being an acknowledged effective treatment for autistic children, the Conservative government refuses to recognize it as medically necessary for funding through OHIP. Through IBI treatment many children have overcome the illness to become fully functional members of society. Recently the British Columbia Court of Appeal ordered the BC government to fund IBI for all autistic children who need it, regardless of age.

At Martel's request on behalf of two families with autistic children, Ontario's Ombudsman is now investigating the long waiting lists for IBI treatment. An online version of Martel's petition calling for effective Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) treatment for all autistic children is at www.ontariondp.on.ca.

3. Many questions from family with an autistic child (Toronto Star 19 November 2002)

GUELPH - Jacob Kahn is falling between the cracks and his parents, Len and Julie, are concerned that despite Monday's provincial announcement of an additional \$58.6 million for autistic children, Jacob will continue to fall. The Ministry of

Community, Family and Children's Services has promised an additional \$39.6 million over the next five years to fund intensive behavioural intervention - a form of therapy targeted at autistic children aged two to five. The ministry will also inject \$19 million to start new programmes for children over age six, to reinforce the early intervention as children move out of the home and into school. Len Kahn is concerned it's a panacea that doesn't fit the individual needs of autistic children. "Everything is focussed on IBI," said Kahn on Tuesday. "IBI is being positioned as a cure or solution to autism but it's! not. It's just one treatment - to focus on one treatment is dangerous. "Autism is a very complex condition and this is a simplistic solution." While Jacob has benefitted from the intervention, which the family now pays for because he's too old for the government-funded programme, there needs to be more support, Kahn said. Jacob is eight years old. "Between therapy and respite, our cost to keep Jacob at home is about \$50,000 a year. The government gives us \$10,000. That's my issue," said Kahn. "I don't know if this new money will help us."

Shelley Martel, provincial NDP health critic, said the new funding fails children currently on waiting lists for the early treatment, who will be too old to qualify once the money finally kicks in. The funding will be phased in over five years. "That \$19 million will be useless for kids who never got the IBI treatment. What's appalling is that the government has not ended its discrimination against children over six, it hasn't provided any timelines for the flow of funds and none of it applies to this year. "It leads me to question how serious they are about helping kids," said Martel.

Linda Rothney is the chief executive officer of Erinoak, one of nine children's treatment centres in Ontario that, among other responsibilities, oversees the intensive behavioural intervention treatment for autistic children. Erinoak covers Halton, Peel, Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin. She said the treatment is most effective in young children, which is why the ministry is targeting that age group. "It's 20 to 40 hours a week of intense, one-on-one time with a therapist. It's just not practical for school-aged children and there's nothing in the literature that shows IBI in children over age six is warranted," Rothney said. She doesn't know for certain how the money will be distributed, but expects Erinoak's \$6.3 million budget for autism programmes will double with this influx of cash. She said in Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin, there are 22 children receiving the treatment and 36 on a waiting list. The ministry estimates that about 600 children across Ontario are waiting for treatment. Martel said the figure is closer to 900. Community, Family and Children's Services

Minister Brenda Elliott acknowledged that the greatest challenge will be in catching the children, like Jacob, who are too old for the early treatment programme, to provide appropriate supports for them in and out of the classroom. "This is all very new - before 1999 there were no government funded services for autistic kids. Now we have \$100 million devoted to them," said Elliott, the Guelph-Wellington MPP. "We're not making wild promises here. We're being responsive to parents and investing in the right places," she said.

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