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ONTABA Calls for Investments to Quell Continuing Reliance on Crisis Intervention and Emergency Services for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

August 24 2016 Toronto, Ontario - There are over 61,000 people living with developmental disabilities in Ontario. The Ombudsman’s Investigation of Adults with Developmental Disabilities in Crisis was initiated after more than 1400 complaints were received about services for Ontarians with developmental disabilities. The report highlights significant gaps in community social services and health care that frequently result in crisis situations and inappropriate placement of individuals in emergency departments, psychiatric facilities, long-term care homes, and prisons. Many individuals with developmental disabilities remain unidentified by social services and face homelessness.

The Ombudsman’s report outlines the effectiveness of behaviour analytic services in improving the dire situation of adults with developmental disabilities in many cases, but identifies the tragic unavailability of these important services. The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) strongly urges an interministerial strategy of well-funded, dedicated behaviour analytic clinical services and staff training to address the continued reliance on crisis intervention, the overuse and misuse of psychotropic medication and the strain on emergency services. Although they can be preventative and life-changing, behaviour analytic services are often mobilized only once a person with complex needs is already in crisis. By this point many individuals have been struggling for a long-time without receiving the level of support they require. This takes a significant emotional toll on the person in crisis, their family and the staff who support them. Each day a person spends in crisis is a day they are not leading a fulfilling life and unfortunately these crises often last years.

As practitioners, many behaviour analysts provide life-changing clinical supports to individuals living with developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, many social service and health care agencies do not have dedicated behaviour analytic services and the agencies that do often have excessive waitlists, large consultant caseloads, and limited quality assurance mechanisms. There is a large body of research demonstrating the efficacy of behaviour analytic services in treating the challenging behaviours associated with the crises described in the Ombudsman’s report and in teaching adaptive skills that promote independence. An investment in behaviour analytic services is an investment in the health and safety of adults with developmental disabilities.

ONTABA advocates for an interministerial response that addresses service gaps and provides access to responsive, high-quality, evidence-based behaviour analytic services. ONTABA looks forward to working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario Ombudsman to implement the many important recommendations outlined in the report.

ONTABA is the largest professional organization representing behaviour analysts in Canada. We serve as a resource for practitioners and consumers of behaviour analytic services, a respected community partner, and a dedicated advocate for individuals in need of life-changing behaviour analytic services. Our mission is to demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and innovation in education, training, and research for the ethical and effective application of behaviour analysis.

For more information or to speak with a content expert, please email us contact@ontaba.org