Dear Minister Sousa,

On behalf of the Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis, I would like to thank you for the invitation and opportunity to provide input into the 2017 provincial budget.

Applied Behaviour Analysis is a unique scientific discipline that uses the principles of learning to address issues of social significance. Behaviour analysts often work with individuals with autism, developmental disabilities, acquired brain injuries, mental health issues, and the challenges associated with dementia and aging. Although the practice of behaviour analysis represents an established and growing evidence base across many populations and settings, these services remain underutilized, underfunded and unregulated in Ontario.

An investment in behaviour analytic services will lead to significant savings for Ontarians and will contribute to an improved quality of life for some of Ontario’s most vulnerable citizens. There are several opportunities for investment:

- Research indicates that when individuals with autism receive comprehensive behaviour analytic treatments in childhood, they require less intensive social services as adolescents and adults\(^1\). The cost of supporting an individual with autism across the lifespan is estimated to be approximately $2-$5.5 million per individual while the cost savings of early intervention with behaviour analytic services have been estimated at more than $1.5 million per person between the ages of 3-55\(^2\).

- Individuals with developmental disabilities who are not effectively supported in the community often end up in inappropriate settings such as psychiatric inpatient units, which can cost taxpayers in excess of $1500 per day. The recent report of Ontario’s Ombudsman serves as an example of the consequences of failing to provide adequate community supports\(^3\). Investing in behaviour analysts in community programs and in tertiary care settings will have a preventative effect while facilitating transitions to inclusive community settings.

- Seniors experiencing changes associated with dementia and aging can be supported in community settings given the appropriate behaviour analytic resources are made available. Without these supports however, they are often exposed to restrictive interventions and inappropriate sedation with psychotropic medications; ineffective procedures that cost the taxpayers millions of dollars and have a deleterious effect on the quality of life of our elders.

---

\(^1\) Eggleton (2007) Pay now or pay later: Autism families in crisis. SSSCAST


• Ultra-complex service users, such as homeless individuals with intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injuries, and substance use disorders can place an incredible financial strain on the health and social service systems. Including behaviour analysts on Family Health Teams with other mental health care professionals such as psychologists, could ameliorate this burden and facilitate successful transitions to sustainable housing options and improved outcomes for our citizens that are suffering.

• Ontario’s education system is currently feeling the effects of under-funded and unregulated behaviour analytic services. This can be directly observed in the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario’s recent call to action around violence in schools⁴. The costs associated with staff injuries and the negative impact on individuals and families is significant.

Within the last 4 years, the provincial government has injected more than $2 billion annually into services for adults with developmental disabilities, $333 million into treatments for autism spectrum disorders, and more than $60 million to address the behavioural health needs of seniors with challenging behaviours associated with dementia and other neurological conditions. Significant resources have also been directed towards managing challenging behaviour and addressing skill deficits in education, mental health, corrections, and with at-risk youth across the province. Unfortunately, only a small portion of these funds are being allocated to evidence-based behaviour analytic services.

There is an urgent need to protect and expand these investments. Unlike other provinces and regions with similar services, the profession of behaviour analysis remains unregulated in Ontario. Without a regulatory program, Ontario risks directing these funds in ways that could harm, rather than help vulnerable individuals.

Behaviour analysts urge the Minister of Finance to prioritize investments in behaviour analytic services for vulnerable children, youth, adults, and seniors and to protect these investments by encouraging relevant Ministries (MCYS, MoHLTC, MoE, MCSS) to pursue professional regulation and rigorous quality assurance.

Sincerely,
Louis Busch, President
Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis
On behalf of the ONTABA Board of Directors

⁴ http://www.etfo.ca/MediaRoom/MediaReleases/Documents/CalltoAction.pdf