Ford Government’s Autism Policy is Misguided
ONTABA Demands Meaningful Consultation with Experts

TORONTO, ON, (February 13, 2019) – The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) is calling upon the provincial government to reconsider its harmful autism policy and enter into new meaningful consultations with autism experts, families of children with autism and people with autism. There have been some unfortunate misperceptions of ONTABA’s mandate and purpose conveyed to the press by the Minister and her Office, likely due to the limited contact that they have had with our organization.

“Parents and the professionals who provide support for their children are scared and confused and will likely remain so for some time,” said Dr. Adrienne Perry, C. Psych., Professor, BCBA-D, and long time ONTABA member. “Elimination of the waitlist in the absence of enough trained professionals will not solve anything. The solution can only begin with an investment in capacity building and quality oversight of behaviour analysis. Instead, we can expect chaos from a government that claims it will establish a new agency in less than eight weeks to administer the new program.”

The government is pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach providing families with arbitrary funding; a lifetime maximum of up to $5,000/year ($55,000 max) for school-age children and up to a maximum of $20,000/year ($140,000 max) up to age 5. Amounts will generally be lower depending on age and income testing.

Many families will not be able to access the necessary type and amount of evidence-based intervention required for their children to achieve optimal outcomes. The announced plan will result in the abrupt termination of intensive services for those currently receiving the necessary dosage. This is harmful and potentially dangerous for children in treatment (e.g., those with severe self-injury).

“We all want to see the wait list cleared,” said Hubert Wong, a father of child with autism. “However, Doug Ford and Lisa MacLeod’s proposed solution leaves most children in the lurch. The community has been clear in saying that redistribution of funds based by age and family income is unethical and insufficient. Parents want their children to get the help they need, not the respite (glorified babysitting) that Minister MacLeod is suggesting we spend the money on. By not allocating enough funds for ABA, they are not providing parents the choice they claim to.”

ONTABA is urging the government to re-evaluate this policy direction, taking into consideration the science and the consistent recommendations of professional associations across North America. If children do not receive the evidence-based treatment they need now, Ontario taxpayers will end up paying much more in the future, through substantially higher costs to support many children in the education, social services, medical, and legal systems (see Canadian Senate Committee’s report Pay Now or Pay Later: Autism Families in Crisis, 2007).

“Fiscally responsible funding models are effective in other jurisdictions,” adds Dr. Julie Koudys, Chair of the ONTABA Ethics & Jurisprudence Committee. “The government must be open to meaningful consultations.”

ONTABA
The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) is the largest not-for-profit professional organization representing behaviour analysts in Canada. Our mission is to demonstrate leadership, knowledge, and innovation in education, training, and research for the ethical and effective application of behaviour analysis. ONTABA has been working for many years towards autonomous regulation of behaviour analysts to ensure public protection for recipients of behaviour analytic services.
ONTABA’s volunteer board of directors has been the duly elected voice of behaviour analysts in the province for over 25 years. Our membership is comprised of committed individuals who provide essential behaviour analytic services every day, regulated health professionals (e.g., Clinical Psychologists, Speech & Language Pathologists, Nurses), university and college educators, parents and advocates. Our members, advisors, and volunteers are experts in behaviour analysis for autism as well as other populations and have served on numerous government and expert committees. We are a resource for practitioners and people who access behaviour analytic services, a respected community partner, and a dedicated advocate for those in need of life-altering behaviour analytic services. ONTABA is not a lobby group.

“Our association has made repeated and responsible efforts to maintain an open and productive dialogue developed with past governments. We still welcome the opportunity to work with this government to bring forward tangible ideas to better meet the needs of children and youth with autism who are waiting for evidence-based interventions at optimal levels to effect lasting change.” said Dr. Kendra Thomson, ONTABA’s President-Elect.

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