Ensuring Quality Service Provision: A Statement on the Importance of Regulation, Accreditation and the Appropriate Clinical Oversight of Behaviour Analytic Programs for Children and Youth with ASD in Ontario

INTRODUCTION
Children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and their families, have the right to safe and effective behaviour analytic services. Delivery of these services requires specialized training.

The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) has focused this position statement on providing parents, practitioners, and policy makers with information on the importance of public protection for individuals who receive behaviour analytic services. ONTABA is a not-for-profit professional organization representing behaviour analysts in Ontario. We serve as a resource for practitioners and users 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ONTARIO AUTISM PROGRAM
Over the last year, members of ONTABA’s Board of Directors, Autism Task Force, Ontario Scientific Expert Taskforce for the Treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (OSETT-ASD), Professional Regulation Committee (PRC), and our representative on the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) Advisory Committee have worked tirelessly to advocate for behaviour analytic services that will lead to the best possible outcomes for children and youth with ASD. These efforts have included hundreds of volunteer hours and numerous meetings with the Minister of Children and Youth Services, Michael Coteau, Minister of Education, Mitzie Hunter, senior policy advisors from both ministries, representatives from Specialized Services and Supports, the Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinical Expert Committee, the OAP Implementation Committee, as well as a variety of parents, caregivers and community stakeholders.

Our proposed model for the Ontario Autism Program that was presented to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on April 21st 2017 contains a number of central components:

- Parent choice as a priority with equity in the funding made available for those choices.
- Individualized assessment and intervention driven by a behaviour analytic framework.
Continued access to services based on an ongoing assessment of each individual's unique needs.

An emphasis on eliminating unnecessary assessment as a prerequisite to service initiation.

An emphasis on a true continuum of evidence-based services offered through the lifespan (i.e., toddlers to early adulthood up to 21 years)

A focus on improving interprofessional collaboration, while protecting the autonomy of behaviour analysts in making decisions about behaviour analytic service provision.

A focus on safe and effective treatment by ensuring appropriately qualified behaviour analysts supervise treatment, within accredited service providers.

Prioritization of the regulation of behaviour analysts through a public act to protect service users and ensure access to high quality behaviour analytic care across sectors.

A system with extensive independent accountability, evaluation, and support structures free of conflict-of-interest.

**CLINICAL SUPERVISION BY APPROPRIATELY QUALIFIED BEHAVIOUR ANALYSTS**

The Autism Special Interest Group of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (2007; 2013) indicated that a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) credential is a necessary, but not sufficient, qualification for professionals to direct ABA intervention for individuals with ASD. They proposed that supervisors of ABA interventions for persons with ASD should have received extensive supervised experience in the field (i.e., minimum 5 years), and additional training on the design, monitoring, and supervision of ABA interventions. They suggest that guidelines for service provision should define competency (e.g., minimum number of years of supervisory experience, programming for a diversity of individuals with ASD with a range of profiles and ages, training a sufficient number of family members and service implementers, and experience with a variety of ABA procedures across multiple environments, etc.).

*The BACB has four registered/trademarked levels of credentials BCBA-D™, BCBA®, BCaBA®, and RBT® (For a detailed description of required qualifications readers are directed to the Association for Behavior Analysis International Autism Special Interest Group – Consumer Guidelines, 2013; http://www.asatonline.org/pdf/sig.pdf).*

In accordance with these recommendations, Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) agrees that ABA interventions should be developed and supervised by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst/Board Certified Behavior Analyst-Doctoral (BCBA or BCBA-D) **with extensive experience** in the application of ABA interventions for individuals with ASD. This is especially important until public regulation of behavior analysts (BCBAs) is achieved.
In previous decades (including during the inception of the Ontario Autism Intervention Program in 1999) a limited number of BCBAs/BCBA-Ds in Ontario may have been a rationale for external supervision; however, as of 2016, Ontario has one of the highest per capita concentrations of BCBAs worldwide.

The BCBA certification is a distinct credential in the independent professional practice of ABA with competencies, education and experience hour requirements, and a legally and psychometrically validated professional examination. All of these requirements are derived from multiple job/role analysis studies involving thousands of professional behaviour analysts. The BACB has developed the *Professional and Ethical Compliance Code for Behavior Analysts* (BACB, 2014), which it enforces with all credentialed individuals in order to protect recipients of behaviour analytic services. Analogous to other credentialed professions, behaviour analysts do not require supervision from other disciplines.

**LAYERS OF PROTECTION**
PUBLIC REGULATION OF BEHAVIOUR ANALYSTS

In 2001, the Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) formed the Transitional Certification Committee, renamed the Professional Regulation Committee in 2009. For over 15 years these committees have advocated for the regulation of behaviour analysts to enhance public protection. In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services contracted SEG Management Consultants Inc. “to conduct a study to assess the viability of creating an Ontario-based certification process for practitioners of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) working with those with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or with others who benefit from ABA-based methodologies” (e.g., education, gerontology, long-term care, mental health, early childhood programs, etc.).

Advice was also sought on whether there should be a regulatory body established for behaviour analysts in Ontario. In addition, “information on costing for certification and the establishment of a regulatory body was sought” (SEG, 2014).

The recommendations of the report were:
1. There should be some form of regulation of behaviour analysts in Ontario
2. The desired end state should be title protection plus scope of practice
3. There should be a carefully designed transition process to achieve the end state
4. Regulation should be based on the designations/certification of the Behavior Analyst Certification Board® (BACB®)*
5. Regulatory requirements should be applied universally in the end state (i.e., to children and adults across different services and settings).

*At the time of the SEG report, Ontario had 13 BCBA-Ds, 185 BCBAs, and 46 BCaBAs (Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst). As of May 31, 2017 there were approximately 27 BCBA-Ds, 500 BCBAs, and 61 BCaBAs (see Figure 1 below). Given the exponential growth in the field, ONTABA continues to advocate for public regulation to ensure high quality, safe, and effective behaviour analytic services in ASD and across other sectors.
Public regulation of behaviour analysts will provide maximum protection and should be prioritized by government, professionals, those who receive services, and their family members. As the process of regulating a profession involves a multi-year assessment and an interministerial collaborative process, interim protection measures are necessary, such as title protection.

**TITLE PROTECTION**

Title Protection is a component of a regulatory system which ensures that individuals using specific titles have met defined education, experience, and training standards, and possess specific credentials. Title protection prohibits others who do not have those qualifications from using that title. Title protection can be enacted through a public act for the regulation of a profession (which may include the formation of a college). It can also be enacted through a private act, which may include the formation of a registry. A private act can be implemented as an interim measure while public regulation is being pursued, and can provide consumers with information on which professionals have met certain criteria such as professional certification (e.g., certification by the BACB), up-to-date professional liability insurance, a clear vulnerable sector criminal records check,
ACCREDITATION
The Ontario Association of Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) supports the development of an accreditation process to identify clinical and administrative requirements for ABA service providers within the Ontario Autism Program (OAP). Accreditation is already in use in various children and youth services (e.g., Children’s Mental Health Ontario and Behavioural Health Centre of Excellence accreditation models). Accreditation provides an additional layer of protection for children, youth, and families accessing ABA services through the OAP.

ONTABA is currently developing clinical recommendations that could be used within an Ontario accreditation process based on ABA practice guidelines, in addition to expert and stakeholder input. Our goal is to outline the following practice parameters for clinical supervisors:

- Professional credentials required for clinical supervisors;
- Training and experience required for clinical supervisors;
- Requirements regarding vulnerable sector screening and professional liability insurance;
- Requirements for training in Ontario jurisprudence related to delivery of services to children and youth;
- Ethical billing and administrative practices;
- Ongoing quality assurance participation.

We anticipate completion of these recommendations by Fall 2017.

SYSTEMS & LOCAL REVIEW COMMITTEES
In addition to an accreditation process, ONTABA’s proposed model also supports the development of Systems and Local Review Committees. The purpose of a Local Review Committee (LRC) is to ensure that behaviour analytic services are appropriately selected, developed, implemented, and monitored. This committee also ensures that within every aspect of behaviour analytic services the procedures used are humane, ethical, and effective. The Systems Review Committee (SRC) is comprised of expert-level behaviour analysts with extensive research and practice experience, serving in an advisory role. The SRC would provide expertise in the field of ABA to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education, advocate for best practice standards in the field of ABA, and ensure that behaviour support services embody the ethical standards of this field. The SRC could also target knowledge mobilization for
diagnosticians (paediatricians, family physicians, psychologists), advise the Ministries on matters of policy, systems, and procedures, and offer technical assistance to caregivers and providers when disputes cannot be resolved at the local level. (For examples of existing review committees http://apd.myflorida.com/providers/behavioral/docs/7.0-LRC-Model-Bylaws-101810.pdf https://www.abainternational.org/membership/full-members.aspx)

CONCLUSION
The Ontario Association for Behaviour Analysis (ONTABA) recognizes the need to safeguard the welfare of children and youth with ASD and their families, and other individuals who are receiving behaviour analytic services. Following years of research, discussion with stakeholders, consultation with local and international experts in the design and delivery of service systems and practice guidelines for ASD intervention, ONTABA strongly recommends the multiple layers of public protection described above.