



ONTARIO  
ASSOCIATION  
OF CHILDREN'S  
REHABILITATION  
SERVICES

## Modernizing Child Care in Ontario



**Ontario Association of Rehabilitation Services (OACRS)**

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*Ministry of Education Vision Statement:*

*Ontario students will receive the best publicly funded education in the world, measured by high levels of achievement and engagement for all students. Successful learning outcomes will give all students the skills, knowledge and opportunities to attain their potential, to pursue lifelong learning, and to contribute to a prosperous, cohesive society.*

The Ministry of Education has outlined a bold and inclusive vision. Full-Day Kindergarten has been an important pillar of this vision, and by erecting another pillar—a modernized childcare system—the Ministry hopes to strengthen its commitment to Ontario’s children. With the release of “*Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*,” the government is inviting community partners to participate in the development of a seamless model of early childhood learning and care. OACRS is pleased to help the government build this model by participating in the conversations, partnerships and design of a modern child care system.

OACRS’ members, Children’s Treatment Centres (CTCs), plan and provide publically funded services to support children and families in a variety of settings, including preschools, schools, communities, and at home. Like the Ministry of Education, we want *all* children to have the best opportunity to reach their potential. Provincially and in local communities across Ontario, we have participated and partnered in advancing an integrated and seamless system of supports for children with special needs by:

- Supporting 65,000 children and youth annually to meet their developmental, communication and physical potential;
- Acting as pilot sites and leads for speech and language demonstration projects;
- Advancing best practices in the transition of children to Full-Day Kindergarten;
- Advising provincial initiatives related to service integration and inclusion;
- Designing and participating in service delivery design at Best Start and Community tables across Ontario;
- Urging the Ministry of Education to dedicate resources for specialized supports for children entering kindergarten;
- Working with partners in Health and Long-Term Care and Education to identify efficient and effective service delivery.

Whether on a provincial scale or on a local level, we know that our greatest successes are always realized together—that when we pool the resources we have available, we can give families better opportunities.



All families need access to flexible, affordable and quality child care. Families of children with special needs often need extra consideration to support the inclusion of their sons and daughters in child care settings and to manage the extra-ordinary expenses incurred.

OACRS fully supports the Ministry’s vision, and looks forward to helping the government realize it. Within the context of this submission, OACRS is pleased to provide input and advice related to the support of children with special needs in child care.

### 1. Operating Funding Formula

Under the current funding formula, children with special needs may be unduly penalized. The challenge of aligning available space, appropriate funding and specialized services can exclude some children from licensed child care, or unable to meaningfully participate in it. We know that long wait times can sabotage potential. The longer a child waits for identification or intervention, the less effective that intervention may be.

OACRS recommends that any new funding model be accompanied by adequate resources to support children with special needs. All-day care centres should receive a targeted allocation for the provision of specialized supports and services. This recommendation is similar to the one OACRS made with respect to the allocation of resources within the Full-Day Kindergarten budget. Children with special needs who have been well supported in childcare will transition better to school and achieve greater educational outcomes.

OACRS recommends that within the resources identified for child care modernization, a targeted amount of funds be dedicated solely for the integration of children with special needs. OACRS believes *all* child care settings must be ready and able to support *any* child.

Parents of children with special needs must not be unduly financially burdened with the extra costs of their child’s disability. Any change to the funding formula must consider measures to ensure all families are treated equitably.

Finally, with the advent of Full Day Kindergarten in Ontario, more Early Childhood Educators are leaving child care settings to work as Board of Education employees in school classrooms. OACRS recommends that the Ministry address the wage disparities between the child care and education sectors to ensure that well-trained and well-resourced staff are available across the spectrum.



## 2. Capital Funding Priorities

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) can serve as a directional plan to help build public spaces that everyone can use. The government’s “schools first” initiatives provide a focus.

In addition, OACRS recognizes that dedicated space must often be found in child care settings to allow for therapy services and storage of equipment. Currently, funding for specialized equipment in child care settings must be found from operating budgets or, more likely, fundraised. OACRS recommends that capital funding eligibility also includes resources for necessary specialized equipment. All partners will need to work closely and consult widely to ensure that spaces are fully inclusive of all children.

## 3. Quality Programs

OACRS commends the government for its commitment to building an education and childcare framework strong enough to support children with special needs.

Within the current child care system, several barriers to full inclusion for children exist:

- No nursing services are available, which can prohibit the participation of high-need children;
- Current special-needs resourcing is subject to very broad variation across the province. This can result in inequity of access, service scope and volumes across communities;
- In some child care settings, the roles of ECE, SNR staff and Resource Consultants are very narrowly defined;
- Often, when children are identified as having special needs, community agencies must find resources within core budgets to support children or delay intervention;
- Parents may face few choices (if any) of child care settings, as childcare settings may deny access to child with greater than average needs, thus disadvantaging children with special needs;
- The cost of disability can be high for many families. Housing, transportation, extended health care and equipment can place a tremendous financial burden on families. Currently, parents may be asked to also fund the additional expenses necessary to support their child in a child care setting.

With the vision before us of a fully accessible and coordinated early learning system for *all* children, OACRS recommends:

- Establishing “inclusion” of all children as a quality indicator;
- Allowing families to identify their preferred child care setting, knowing that it will be able to support their child’s unique needs;



- Designing a system that is flexible and responsive to changing needs of the child, family and the team supporting them;
- Providing the necessary financial consideration to “level the playing field” for families with children who have special needs;
- Supplying adequate resources to special needs teams, integrating complementary community services to meet the child’s needs;
- Initiating early planning for children’s seamless transition into school;
- Serving children with special needs in age-appropriate childcare settings;
- Training childcare staff and building their capacity to serve children with special needs.

#### **4. Modernized Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

The Ministry of Education cannot modernize Ontario’s childcare system alone. Not only does it need the help of community partners, it needs the cooperation of other Ministries. OACRS advises the Ministry of Education to coordinate its efforts with the Ministries of Health and Long Term Care, Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Training, Colleges and Universities, and others to integrate planning and development.

OACRS believes that all children have the right to quality early learning and education. Entry cannot be denied to a child based on his or her unique needs. Similar to the education system, child care must be legislated for the inclusion of *all* children.

#### **5. Support for Accountability and Capacity Building**

OACRS and its members welcome the increased commitment to accountability and capacity-building. Parents need to have confidence in the caregivers to whom they entrust their children, and professionals working in the system need to be valued partners in a child’s learning journey. We all have more to learn and much to give.

Accountability measures are deeply entrenched in the children’s rehabilitation sector. Service providers regularly employ sophisticated outcome measurement tools such as Goal Attainment Scaling, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, the Early Development Index, accreditation, and formal program evaluation to ensure that provincial standards are met. OACRS supports the Ministry’s initiative to make the childcare sector accountable and results-driven, and we would be happy to act as a capacity-building resource for the standard childcare sector.



## Conclusion

Child care is not a privilege—child care is a right. To protect the right of *all* Ontarian children to be well cared for, the Ministry of Education must ensure that the province’s childcare system is accessible, available, and affordable. OACRS and its member CTCs not only share the government’s vision of giving “all students the skills, knowledge and opportunities to attain their potential”; we actively support this vision by working with families, communities, and government partners to remove barriers that obstruct children who face special challenges, and help build pathways towards their success. When we have laid down the brickwork for an inclusive, integrated child care system, these pathways will take Ontario’s children far.

While children have different needs, they all deserve the same opportunity to realize their potential. We are eager to help the Ministry build a child care system that we can all be proud of, that children can all participate in. A system that gives every child every chance to succeed.



**About OACRS**

Since 1978, the Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (OACRS) has represented the interests of Children's Rehabilitation Centres in Ontario. Through our services as a membership organization, we provide a powerful united voice for our member centres and deliver leadership by influencing policy, programs and funding to maximize the potential for all children and youth facing physical, communication and/or developmental challenges. Currently OACRS represents all 21 Children's Treatment Centres in Ontario.

OACRS is committed to advancing an integrated, inclusive and family-centred sector. OACRS' members provide innovative therapies and extensive treatment options to 60,000 children with physical, developmental and communications needs annually in cities, towns and rural areas across the province.

Our partners in children's rehabilitation include the Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Education and Health and Long-term Care. Together our members provide over \$185 million of services on a yearly basis.

Ontario children's rehabilitation providers have been building brighter futures for children and strengthening families for over half a century. Using a family-centred approach, they provide holistic care: service planning and delivery is focused on the "whole child". The centres have long-term and close relationships with the children and youth they serve, as well as with their families, and have a clear understanding of the challenges families face and the supports that they need.

**What services do they provide?**

To reach their full potential, children and youth with disabilities and their families need a wide range of services. Experienced and dedicated professional staff at member centres offer a broad range of assessment, diagnosis, treatment and community programs.

**Who is served?**

Currently 65,000 children and youth with disabilities and their families are served by the 21 children's rehabilitation providers that are members of OACRS. These children and youth have a variety of development, physical and communication challenges such as: autism spectrum disorder, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy and developmental delay.

*Collectively we are working to ensure that all children and youth in Ontario have the best opportunity to succeed and reach their full potential.*

