

VULNERABLE GROUPS

DEAFNESS AND ACCESSIBILITY

In general, the needs of Deaf Ontarians are not being fully met with respect to language acquisition, direct access to curriculum in education, accommodations in the classroom, access to mental health services in AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL), and adequate accommodation and cultural sensitivity.

There are an estimated 357,000 Culturally Deaf persons and 3.21 million hard-of-hearing persons in Canada. No fully credible census of Deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing people has ever been conducted in Canada.⁴⁹ In Ontario, it's estimated that there are 660,000 persons who are Culturally Deaf and hard-of-hearing (530,210 or 4.74% of the population in 2006).

Nearly 1 out of every 4 adult Canadians reports having some hearing loss, although closer to 10% of people identify themselves as culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.⁵⁰ Hearing loss is the third most prevalent chronic condition in older adults and the most widespread disability as aging is the number one cause of hearing loss. The incidence of hearing loss is poised to climb dramatically as our population ages.

There is much work that needs to be done through the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) regarding children acquiring language, for instance, and with the Ontario Ministry of Education regarding access and accommodation in education, and with the Ontario Ministry of Health regarding access to mental health services.

Deaf children are still entering school without age-appropriate language skills. An example is the MCYS INFANT HEARING PROGRAM that stops language development services when the child enters school, and the Ministry of Education which is not prepared to accommodate students who need more language development to succeed in school. Families need and expect more.

The province has been very slow to implement the 2005 ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (AODA). Enacted in 2005, the Act sets out a plan to improve accessibility standards for Ontarians with physical and mental disabilities to all public establishments by 2025.

The implications for the Deaf community are challenging if AODA is not fully implemented. Deaf Ontarians continue to face barriers at every turn. In terms of employment, they are either unemployed or under-employed at a rate which is outrageously high when compared to the general population and also when compared to those with other disabilities. The majority of Deaf persons in Ontario generally live below 'poverty line'.

Deaf persons face barriers in accessing community and government services even with the customer services standard implemented. While AODA covers Customer Services, Information and Communication, Education, Transportation, Employment, and the BUILT ENVIRONMENT⁵¹, there is a very long way to go to meet the AODA 2025 deadline for an accessible Ontario.

A newly elected government needs to ensure that agencies providing services for the Deaf are not underfunded. It puts limitations on the number of families and individuals who can be served.

They often ‘fall through cracks’ of society’s social safety net as in the ability, for instance, of accessing mental health services and language acquisition services.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Growing waiting lists and increases in the number of families in crisis are urgent and high risk challenges facing people living with developmental disabilities and their families in Ontario.

There are young people living with a developmental disability who leave school because they need more complex care and older individuals living with aging parents.

It is essential that steps be taken that enable supports and services to reach a broader range of people, encourage and allow new initiatives to be launched and ensure long term financial and support stability of agencies supporting individuals with special needs, which includes some member agencies of Catholic Charities.

“It is often said that societies are judged on how they treat the most vulnerable of their members. The time has come to move beyond apologies and work towards a consistent, co-ordinated, collaborative, and responsive developmental services system, able to effectively and humanely meet the needs of individuals and families in crisis.” Ombudsman of Ontario: Nowhere to Turn Investigation of crisis involving adults with developmental disabilities. – August 24, 2016

Following the 2016 Ontario Ombudsman’s Report: NOWHERE TO TURN, and a 2017 Operational Survey⁵² undertaken by Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs(OASIS),⁵³ there was a move from an institutional care model to community-based approach that promoted social inclusion, individual choice and independence for persons living with a developmental disability.

Unfortunately, there have been unintended consequences during this transformation. Long-term failure to provide base funding budget increases makes it difficult for agencies to keep up with rising costs. It also hampers their ability to carry out legislated changes. It also compromises system capacity and the long-term sustainability of a sector clearly identified as already being in crisis.

There has been long term erosion and instability created by multiple years of no base funding to the developmental sector and the impact of nine years of zero budget increases plus lack of funding for pay equity obligations and cost of living increases. It has all taken its toll, resulting in cuts to staffing hours and staff as well as the loss of important programs. Agencies have to devote more time to comply with administrative regulations, which is time taken away from client care.

Adults living with developmental disabilities and their families should be able to live rich and fulfilling lives. It is not going to happen, if funding and supports are only realized when an individual and their family goes into crisis. We need to support people to overcome barriers to full inclusion and citizenship within their communities. We need quality, cost effective supports and services to ensure that people living with a developmental disability are active and present in all aspects of community.⁵⁴

The newly elected government must continue to work toward the development of sustainable strategies to ensure that all individuals needing supports are able to access the system in a timely way, ensure the sustainability of quality supports and services, and develop a long-term plan to increase the opportunities for inclusion and participation of people with a developmental disability in communities throughout Ontario.⁵⁵ It must put in place a mechanism to monitor and adjust annual funding levels on a long-term basis to address the ever-increasing wait list.⁵⁶

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There is still a long way to go to end widespread Violence Against Women despite the progress that has been made. A newly elected government must continue the momentum to bring about an end to gender-based violence, and providing support to survivors of violence and addressing the root causes.

In March 2018, the provincial government announced that it would invest \$242 million being over three years in Gender Based Violence Services.⁵⁷ Women still experience multiple forms of violence. By developing holistic supports for them as well as their children, there is the potential, for example, of ending homelessness and preventing long-term homelessness.⁵⁸

There is great need for research that would focus on trauma-informed care and peer support. Since one of the first things to occur following domestic violence, for example, is that a woman, often with her children, must flee their home. There is also a need to focus on successful transition from a situation of homelessness to stability. A 'cultural lens', in addition to one of gender, needs to be added to examining the effects of domestic violence and homelessness.

When we see that shift, we will see mandates for training for judges, police and the those in the judicial system that goes well beyond a token one hour in service, and is woven throughout all that is taught and trained. It's clear that we need to continue to press on ending domestic and other forms of violence against women. It should be front and center for any new government.

OLDER PERSONS | 'SENIORS'

The number of older adults and seniors in Ontario over 65 is projected to hit 4.1 million, or 23.4% of the Ontario's population by 2036. Poverty and homelessness is alarmingly high among seniors.

It is not surprising then that income security is steadily rising and among the most prevalent factors that undermine an older adult's sense of well-being. As they age, many seniors become disconnected from their family, which contributes to their isolation and vulnerability.

Any new government must make a priority to support frontline social service agencies who provide on-going programs to vulnerable older adults. There is especially a growing need to ensure that there is affordable housing for older persons that is safe, accessible, adaptable and barrier-free.

The needs of Ontario's aging population must be a critical consideration in terms of health care services, especially focussing on difficulties faced by seniors in accessing health care services, lack of treatment for a specific medical condition, the need for low-cost dental care, inadequate services for long-term care, continuing care and rehabilitation, and inadequate community-based health care.⁵⁹

The incidence of elder abuse remains a grave concern, fuelled by negative attitudes towards the elderly and coupled with their economic and social vulnerability. While it most obviously means physical abuse including forced confinement; it often means financial abuse such as misusing a power of attorney. It often means emotional abuse, treating an older person like a child or humiliating, insulting, frightening, threatening or ignoring an older person.⁶⁰

Seniors who have limited movement and mobility often suffer from sheer neglect in terms of proper nutrition and medical attention and other necessary care. For older persons who are Culturally Deaf and hard-of-hearing, they often must endure 'communication abuse' because their need to speech-read is dismissed or they are misdiagnosed because they cannot hear and so cannot respond.⁶¹

Increasing numbers of Canadians are caring for aging or ailing family members. It is an issue that is important to both older persons and younger persons alike, especially in light of a rapidly increasing aging population and greater emphasis by government on home care.⁶²

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative Justice focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the community at large in the context of our criminal justice system.

Restorative Justice should be the primary approach to just, 'right' relationships, to acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and to healing in a community. This vision of relationship is one that fosters more and more the growth of a response to deep hurt and painful confrontations in personal, social, community, and professional life.

In the criminal justice context, since the last provincial and federal election, both governments have put increasing emphasis on the direct and intentional application of restorative justice principles to the criminal justice system. Both have invested in [study and research](#) around the present practices.

The federal government is discerning and articulating ways to re-design the system stemming from RJ principles.

The provincial government is dealing with concrete problems plaguing the justice system, such as inmate deaths, the unlimited use of solitary confinement, over-crowding in the jails, and underfunded re-integration programs, especially the bail programs.⁶³ Changes in how to do justice spring from changes in our personal relationships. Political support for the direction that Restorative Justice brings is critical to its further implementation.

50 Canadian Hearing Society Awareness Survey 2002. 51 In social science, the term built environment, or built world, refers to the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from buildings to parks. It has been defined as "the human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis." 52 4th Operating Cost Pressures Survey, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS). 2017 53 Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS) is a volunteer-run, member-driven provincial organization. Its member agencies serve over 65,000 of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens and employ 25, 000 full and part-time staff. Its 195 member agencies currently provide more than 85% of all developmental services funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. 54 Submission to Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Ontario Budget 2018, Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS). January 2018. 55 Recent statistics show that 48% of people on the waitlist have low to moderate support needs and may never receive services if we continue using a reactive model of crisis management rather than a proactive method of service delivery. The current funding and service models are not sustainable to address future needs. 56 As of March 31, 2016, approximately 14,900 individuals were waiting for Ministry-funded residential supports across Ontario, according to Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS). 57 Ontario Launches New Strategy to End Gender-Based Violence Comprehensive Investments Will Support Survivors and Address the Root Causes of Violence March 1, 2018 58 Ontario Launches New Strategy to End Gender-Based Violence Comprehensive Investments Will Support Survivors and Address the Root Causes of Violence March 1, 2018 59 'Specific issues facing older persons,' Consultation Paper: The changing face of Ontario - Discrimination and our aging population, Ontario Human Rights Commission. May 31, 2000 60 Dialogue on Ontario's Elder Abuse Strategy, Lough Barnes Consulting Group. July 2015 61 'Time for Action,' Advancing Human Right for Older Ontarians, Ontario Human Rights Commission. June 2001. 62 'Specific issues facing older persons,' Consultation Paper: The changing face of Ontario - Discrimination and our aging population, Ontario Human Rights Commission. May 31, 2000 63 'Independent Review of Ontario Corrections,' Corrections in Ontario: Directions for Reform, Howard Sapers, Ontario Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services. September 2017