



Public Policy Roundup

Spring 2015

Ontario's Special Needs Strategy for Children and Youth

A new Special Needs Strategy is being developed by the Ministries of Education, Children & Youth Services, Community & Social Services, and Health & Long Term Care. Significant changes are being proposed to the system for children with special needs, including how speech/language and occupational therapy services are offered. Planning is underway in 34 regions of the province. One of the directives from the Ministries is that families and youth must be consulted as part of the planning process. More information about the initiative can be found on the Special Needs Strategy web portal by registering at: <http://specialneedsstrategy.children.gov.on.ca/register/>.

Highlights

- A new developmental screen will help identify early signs or risks of delays to development in children from birth to 6 years of age
- Children who need speech-language therapy, occupational therapy and/or physiotherapy services will receive seamless services from birth through the school years.
- Parents of children and youth with multiple or complex special needs will have one identifiable place where they can go for coordinated service planning and will know who is responsible for developing and monitoring their child's plan.
- The new Service Planning Coordinators will coordinate service plans for children and youth with multiple or complex special needs and help parents navigate services across multiple service types, including children's mental health services.
- Service Planning Coordinators will be responsible for connecting with children's mental health lead agencies when children have mental health service needs so that mental health services are part of the coordinated service plan.

Moving on Mental Health Initiative

In November 2012, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) launched *Moving on Mental Health*, with the objective of creating a system where children and youth with mental health problems and their families in all parts of Ontario will know what mental health services are available in their communities; and how to access the mental health services and supports that will meet their needs.

A key element of *Moving on Mental Health* is the identification of one lead agency in each defined service areas across Ontario. Lead agencies will be responsible for establishing and maintaining access to core, community-based CYMH services, including those in French where appropriate, through a combination of their own, directly-delivered services and by contracting with other providers to deliver services. The lead agencies in 16 service areas have been chosen and can be found on the Moving on Mental Health website:

www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/moving-on-mental-health.aspx.

Moran Review of the AODA

On February 13, 2015 the Ontario Government released the final report of the [Second Legislative Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#), halfway between the unanimous passing of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2005 and the goal set for a completely accessible Ontario in 2025. Ms. Moran had held consultation meetings around the province and provided an opportunity for anyone to submit confidential feedback or a written submission on how the present provisions of the AODA are working.

In her recommendations Ms. Moran spent some time on transparent enforcement, streamlining of processes and public awareness. She recommended that the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario (ADO) release information on AODA enforcement actions at least every 3 months, and that there be a meaningful and well-publicized feedback mechanism. She supported the plan to establish an accessible toll-free phone number to report AODA violations (since announced on March 23, 2015) but suggested broadening the tool to enable on-line as well as mail-in reporting. Moran recommended that more guidance be given to obligated organizations and that a resource centre to provide quick answers about compliance could be extremely helpful. In addition, she recommended that there be a comprehensive public awareness campaign.

The review found strong support for development of additional standards for the health care and education sectors. Moran recommended that the responsible ministries take the lead and work with people with disabilities and stakeholders in these sectors to identify accessibility barriers and solutions, with oversight from the Accessibility Standards Advisability Council. It is notable that one of the possible targets she mentions is timelines for the accommodation process for postsecondary students, an issue for many students with learning disabilities.