



Family Alliance Ontario

Representing people with disabilities, their families, and their friends

Open Letter: **A CRISIS UNFOLDING** COVID-19 Impacts on Families Caring for Vulnerable People with Disabilities at Home

April 17, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health of Ontario
College Park 5th Floor,
777 Bay Street, Toronto, ON M7A 2J3

Hon. Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor
438 University Ave., Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Hon. Premier Ford, Hon. Deputy Premier and Minister Elliott, and Hon. Minister Smith:

Re: COVID-19 Impact on Families Caring for Vulnerable People with Disabilities at Home

Family Alliance Ontario shares grave concerns regarding Ontario's **non-response** to mitigate the impact of the major surge in COVID Pandemic on tens of thousands of Ontario families; many of whom are senior and/or themselves vulnerable, who are caring for a very vulnerable family member with a disability. As a disability organization, we write in particular to underscore the disproportionate and adverse impact this continued **non-response** will have on people with disabilities and their families and make recommendations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting families in our communities caring for persons with disabilities at home. Our communities are more

*Family Alliance Ontario
c/o Durham Family Network
20 - 850 King Street W.
Oshawa, ON, L1J 8N5
alliance@family-alliance.com
905-723-8111*

vulnerable to the virus and are being severely impacted physically, emotionally and financially by the necessary emergency response measures, i.e.: physical distancing, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies and recommendations, which interfere with the supports they need for daily living or is simply impossible.

Ontario families are filling the gaps in disability supports for their loved ones. They have to step up and step away from other responsibilities and employment. These families are personally absorbing the costs of COVID-19. Families are terrified of what will happen if they themselves become infected and must self-quarantine. Panic is pervasive and severe mental health breakdowns are likely. Who will step in and provide that care?

Ontario must respect the human rights of all persons, including persons with disabilities and their families. Even though it is an emergency situation, the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be used as justification for discrimination. The rationing of scarce resources in both the health care and the Developmental Services system during this health crisis cannot be used as justification for discrimination.

To this end, we make the following specific recommendations:

1) People with disabilities and their families must have equitable access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and sanitation supplies to protect their families and the people who support them.

- Assist families by directly providing or ensuring viable sources of PPE.
- Establish flexibility for policies requiring PPE for personnel or people where justified.
- Provide immediate financial resources directly to families.
- An automatic COVID related emergency benefit added to the Ontario Disability Support Plan payment.

2) People with disabilities and their families must have immediate access to financial resources. Due to the mandated emergency measures families are losing long time support workers who must now choose between part time work with a family or full-time work with increased pay within long term care or a service agency.

- Immediate increase from the Room and Board amount of Ontario Disability Support Plan benefits to the full benefit of \$1,169.00.
- Flexibility of using Passport/Special Services at Home (SSAH) and all other individualized sources of funding to minimize exposure to COVID **including paying extended family members** to assist in direct provision for families.

*Family Alliance Ontario
c/o Durham Family Network
20 - 850 King Street W.
Oshawa, ON, L1J 8N5
alliance@family-alliance.com
905-723-8111*

3) Families need to be given the same consideration for COVID related expenses that are given to transfer payment agencies.

- Flexible use of Passport/Special Services at Home (SSAH) and all other individualized sources of funding.
- Increase Funding, similar to other sectors, to equitably increase wages of support workers to keep them working in the people's home.

4) Children and adults with disabilities must be allowed to have a family member or trusted support person accompany them when accessing all medical treatment including hospitals, in order to ensure direct assistance with challenging communication, behaviour and comprehension as well as unique medical challenges.

- The Ontario Government to mandate that accommodation.

5) COVID is a crisis on its own: complicating that fact are the added challenges that families face when providing care without adequate assistance. Families are watching their children regress which results in significant increased risks. Families have attested over time that freely given family-to-family support is essential.

- Funding for family-to-family networks/groups to support freely given connections and supports.

Every family is just one exposure away from a COVID crisis. I urge you on behalf of the 10,000 + people with disabilities who are living with their families in Ontario to engage in dialogue with us. You can contact me at email: familyallianceont@gmail.com or phone: 705-783-3012.

Sincerely,



Carla O'Neill
President

*Family Alliance Ontario
c/o Durham Family Network
20 - 850 King Street W.
Oshawa, ON, L1J 8N5
alliance@family-alliance.com
905-723-8111*