



News Release

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INADEQUATE CHECKING OF ELIGIBILITY FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) The government needs to be more vigilant in ensuring that only those people actually eligible for benefits under the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) receive them, Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2009 Annual Report*, released today.

“We have a situation where some people who may be ineligible are being approved to receive benefits anyway because the government hasn’t followed its own screening procedures,” McCarter said. “And then those who are found eligible typically wait another two months for benefits instead of the prescribed 21 days.”

The ODSP pays benefits to about 250,000 people with physical and/or mental disabilities. Most suffer from chronic disabilities and receive assistance for many years—and in some cases for the rest of their lives. Total annual ODSP benefit payments have risen to more than \$3 billion in the last fiscal year, a 42% increase since the Auditor last examined the program in 2004.

Determining an applicant’s eligibility and the correct amount of assistance to be paid is a two-stage process. Because the first stage relies solely on the individual volunteering his or her own financial information, it is critical that the second stage, which requires third-party verification of certain information provided by the applicant, be properly done. However, this was often not the case.

Among the other findings in the Auditor’s Report:

- The total amount of overpayments has increased substantially, to \$663 million as of March 31, 2009, from about \$483 million at the time of the last audit in 2004. In many cases, these overpayments might have been avoided if the Ministry of Community and Social Services had more thoroughly conducted its eligibility and other control processes. It was also delinquent in following up on tips from the public. For example, the Ministry ignored five complaints over a number of years about one family that was later found to have received more than \$100,000 in overpayments.
- Since 2002, program staff have not performed any of the periodic medical reassessments required by law to ensure continuing eligibility for disability support payments. As of March 31, 2009, there were 37,000 individuals identified as requiring such reassessments to ensure that they remained eligible for benefits.

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For more information, please contact:

Jim McCarter
Auditor General
(416) 327-1326

Andréa Vanasse/Joel Ruimy
Communications
(416) 327-2336