



News Release

For Immediate Release

December 4, 2019

ODSP Costs Up 75% in 10 Years: Auditor General

(TORONTO) The annual cost of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) has increased by about 75% in the past 10 years, from \$3.1 billion to about \$5.4 billion, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2019 Annual Report*, released today.

“A significant contributing factor to the program’s rising cost is the increase in the number of individuals and families receiving benefits,” Lysyk said after her Report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

“However, we found that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services never investigated to find out why this happened.”

ODSP provides income support, including health and other benefits, to Ontarians with disabilities who are in financial need. An employment-support program is also available to help recipients find and keep a job so they can live as independently as possible.

The Report noted that since 2008/09, the average monthly number of ODSP cases—a single individual or a family unit—has increased by 50%; in contrast, the population in Ontario has increased by just 12% over the same period.

In 2018/19, the Ministry provided ODSP income support to more than 510,000 individuals, comprising recipients and their qualifying family members.

Among the other findings in the Report:

- Over 40% of ODSP applicants are confirmed to be disabled after only a cursory review of their application, representing a 56% increase from the time of the Auditor General’s last audit of ODSP in 2009. Despite the significance of this increase, the Ministry had not analyzed the reasons for the increase to ensure these decisions were appropriate and made in accordance with the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act (Act)*.
- The Ministry rarely set future medical reviews as required by legislation, which resulted in the majority of approved applicants confirmed as disabled for life. The number of approved disability applications that were not assigned a medical review date and, instead, approved as disabled for life increased from 51% in 2009 to 80% in 2018/19.
- ODSP caseworkers frequently did not use information from third-party sources, such as tax return information from the Canada Revenue Agency, and credit information from Equifax Canada Inc., to verify financial information declared by ODSP applicants.
- The Ministry did not carry out eligibility verifications required by its directives to identify overpayments and remove ineligible recipients from the program. Between April 2015 and March 2019, the Ministry carried out only about 2% of the eligibility verifications it should have performed according to its directives. The Report calculated that the Ministry might have identified a further \$375 million in overpayments and terminated a further 11,700 cases, leading to annual savings of approximately \$165 million had the remaining eligibility verifications been performed.

- Seventy-five percent of adult family members who were dependent but not disabled were not participating in mandatory employment assistance activities.
- Since 2009/10, the Ministry has overpaid ODSP recipients nearly \$1.1 billion and written off approximately \$400 million in overpayments. Approximately 42,000 fraud allegations had not been investigated on time, and caseworkers are not trained to investigate fraud to ensure only eligible recipients are receiving income support.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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