



Bonnie Lysyk
Auditor General of Ontario

Reflections

When we perform value-for-money audits, we spend considerable time with the organizations we audit—ministries, Crown agencies and organizations in the broader public sector (such as hospitals, long-term-care homes, school boards, universities and colleges)—discussing how their programs and services are delivered to Ontarians and whether they can be delivered more efficiently, economically and effectively.

Our audit work culminates in the issuance of value-for-money audit reports that contain considerable information about the particular subject we have audited. These reports almost always include recommendations designed to improve performance.

Reports are written to provide useful information for senior decision-makers in government and the broader public sector who seek to determine how programs and services can better serve Ontarians, if they are operating in compliance with legislation, and if resources used are achieving the desired program or service outcomes.

Where applicable, our reports also answer questions as to whether there is appropriate oversight of those receiving taxpayer funds and whether monies disbursed through transfer payments, grants or other contractual arrangements are being used as intended. Our reports also look at innovative practices of programs and delivery models elsewhere in Canada, the US and often other jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom and Australia. Although we

will not question government policy, our reports may challenge the status quo on how government policy has been implemented or delivered.

Recommendations are a critical part of our audit reports; their implementation is important to drive positive improvements in the cost-effective delivery of programs and services for Ontarians. The audit process seeks input and agreement on these recommendations from senior management in the entities we audit prior to the finalization of the reports.

After our reports are tabled, we operate with the understanding that the recommendations in those reports will be implemented within a reasonable period of time, which can vary depending on the complexity and work required to implement each recommendation.

Sometimes, recommendations will no longer be applicable—for example, if there have been policy and program changes since our report was issued, or an alternative action has been taken to achieve a positive program or service outcome; this is reasonable and expected. Other recommendations are implemented slowly, or not at all, which can mean that their potential benefits are either delayed or lost.

We have, for a long time, issued follow-up reports two years after publication of the original report to assess the progress made in implementing our recommendations. However, we found that many recommendations older than two years had not been implemented, and the implementation

rate seemed to stagnate after our two-year follow-up reports.

As a result, we set up a team three years ago, with the responsibility to follow up on our recommendations older than two years (beginning with recommendations from our *2012 Annual Report*). We also did this because our audit work showed that recommendations we issued in the past often had to be made again because program and service issues raised in past audits had still not been addressed. Following up on recommendations is often more cost-effective than re-auditing the same operations (where changes have been minimal). It is encouraging that we are seeing, through our follow-up work, steadily increasing implementation rates for recommendations from past years. However, implementation needs to be timelier—it has been taking far too many years before significant improvements to some programs and services are made.

This is illustrated by our comprehensive audit of the Ontario Disability Support Program in **Volume 1, Chapter 3, Section 3.09** of this year's Annual Report, which again highlights some program delivery issues that could have been addressed sooner if our recommendations from previous years' audits of this program had been implemented. There are qualitative and quantitative benefits to be gained from speedier implementation of audit recommendations.

Although we also noted in this year's report that some ministries, agencies and organizations within the public and broader public sectors act faster to implement most if not all of their recommendations, others have implemented or plan to implement only a few recommendations. We encourage the latter to revisit outstanding recommendations and engage us in further discussions on how programs and services can benefit from their implementation.

Finally, a few comments regarding the work of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of the Ontario Legislature. All of our reports are referred to this Committee once they are tabled in the Legislature. The Committee may issue its own reports on topics related to our audits and these are also tabled in the Legislature.

We believe the Committee's work is critical in holding ministries, agencies and organizations in the public and broader public sectors accountable to improve the delivery of programs and services to Ontarians. Their recommendations and/or information requests are, in most cases, being acted on. We also encourage timelier action and implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many people in the public and broader public sectors who have assisted us with completing this year's follow-up work.

The information contained in this volume of our *2019 Annual Report* is the result of the excellent work of the dedicated staff of my Office, with assistance from staff in Ontario's Internal Audit Division. A special mention goes to Mr. Richard Kennedy, the former Chief Internal Auditor and Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Internal Audit Division, for his cooperation and assistance over the years.

I would also like to acknowledge and express my sincere thank you to Mr. Rudolph Chiu, Assistant Auditor General, Health, Energy and Justice, who will be retiring in December 2019 after dedicating over 37 years of public service to our Office. He has significantly contributed to making constructive recommendations to improve program and service delivery in the public and broader public sectors intended to inform and benefit the Legislature and all Ontarians.

We look forward to continuing to serve the Members of Provincial Parliament, and through them, the citizens of Ontario by recommending program and service delivery improvements for the benefit of Ontarians.

Sincerely,



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Auditor General of Ontario