



SPINAL CORD INJURY ONTARIO
LÉSIONS MÉDULLAIRES ONTARIO

2019 ONTARIO BUDGET ANALYSIS

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2019 Ontario Budget: Key Highlights

April 15, 2019

On April 11, the Honorable Minister of Finance Vic Fedeli, tabled the Government of Ontario's 2019 Budget, *Protecting What Matters Most* in the legislature. This is the first provincial budget to be delivered by the Progressive Conservative government since it was first elected in June 2018. The budget highlights Premier Doug Ford's Vision for Ontario for the 2019-20 fiscal year and lays the groundwork for how his government intends to make strategic investments and balance Ontario's fiscal books. Below are the key highlights, investments and potential implications for people with disabilities and the SCI community

1. Health Care

The 2019 budget on health care is strongly centered around the Government's focus on re-structuring the health care system and eliminating "Hallway Medicine" - a promise integral to the Ford election campaign. While we did not see significant commentary related to our [pre-budget submission](#), we look forward to working with the Ford Government on its overall smart investments in healthcare and wrap-around health supports across Ontario for people with SCI and other related disabilities.

Key Budget Highlights:

Health care Spending and Governance Reform

- The Government will increase total Health care spending to \$63.5 billion in 2019/20 (an increase of \$1.3 billion from 2018/19)
- The Government will adopt an integrated health care delivery model by reducing 35 public health units to 10 regional public health entities and Boards with one common governance model by 2020–21.
- The Government will also provide the newly formed "Ontario Health Agency" with responsibility for oversight and coordination of health supply chain management with coverage for hospital devices, as well as devices for community and long-term care.
- The Government will implement a "Digital First" health strategy to increase the use of virtual care and give people digital tools to access their own personal health information.

Hospital Funding

- The Government will invest an additional \$384 million in the hospital sector in 2019/20 (an increase of 2.05%) and will commit \$17 billion in capital grants to modernize hospital infrastructure over the next 10 years.

Long-Term Care

- The Government will commit \$1.75 billion to build 15,000 LTC beds over 5 years (7,232 LTC beds have been approved to be built. Additional proposals will be evaluated over the next few months)

Mental Health

- The Government will invest \$3.8 billion in additional funding for mental health over 10 years including \$174 million in 2019/20.
- Funding will include: support for community mental health and addictions services, mental health and justice services, supportive housing, and acute mental health inpatient beds for priority populations, such as Indigenous peoples and Francophones.

Drugs:

- The Government will conduct a thorough review of the Ontario Drug Benefit Program with changes expected to result in \$140 million in savings.
- The Government will make regulatory changes to the oversight of payments to pharmacies and will be focusing on MedsCheck for patients transitioning between health care settings

Dental Program for Low Income Earners Over 65:

- The Government will make an investment of \$90 million to establish a new dental program for low income seniors
- Starting in Summer 2019, single seniors age 65 and older without existing benefits and with incomes of \$19,300 or less (or senior couples with combined incomes of less than \$32,300) will be eligible to receive dental services in public health units, community health centers and Aboriginal Health Access Centers located throughout the province. This will eventually be expanded to underserved areas, including mobile dental buses and an increased number of dental suites in public health units.

Assistive Devices Program (ADP):

- The Government will implement a better and more competitive pricing model “for home oxygen rates that would result in a reduction of about 17 per cent in price, with savings going to eligible clients who pay a 25 per cent co-payment. Individuals on social assistance will continue to receive benefits at no cost.”
- While we did not see any specific commentary in this Budget regarding ADP reform, the Government has signaled a need for a complete review of the ADP Program in Ontario.

2. Home and Community Care

Budget 2019 makes significant investments in expanding home and community care with targeted investments in supportive and accessible housing – a policy recommendation that SCIO has advocated for with great dedication. The Government recognizes the key role home and community care plays in improving health care outcomes, reducing hospital and LTC congestion, and giving people an opportunity to live the life they choose.

Key Budget Highlights:

Home and Community Care Services

- The Government will invest \$267 million in the expansion of home and community care. This will include; investments in front-line care delivery, such as Personal Support Worker (PSW) services, nursing, therapy and other professional services at home and in the community.
- These investments will also provide community supports - such as meals and transportation, assisted living services in supportive housing, services for people with an acquired brain injury and services for Indigenous peoples and Francophones.

Accessible and Affordable Housing

- The Government will allocate a total of \$174 million in 2019/2020 for supportive and affordable housing and community support initiatives over 10 years.
- The Government will also review more than 20 supportive housing programs in Ontario and work to streamline and improve coordination between programs.
- The Government will partner with the Rick Hansen Foundation to launch the “**Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certificate Program**” – a \$1.3 million investment over two years. The Accessibility Program will “prepare accessibility assessments of businesses and public buildings and, together with property managers and owners, to determine ways to remove any identified barriers for people with visible and invisible disabilities”.

3. Social and Employment Services

We will be watching very closely as the Government redesigns the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) to consolidate complex supplements and benefits into simplified financial support for people with severe disabilities. Members who receive Ontario Works and ODSP will be impacted as the Government commits to the following investments and services reform outlined in the Budget.

Key Budget Highlights:

ODSP and OW

- Ontario Works recipients will be able to keep up to \$300 in earnings per month, an increase from \$200 per month without it impacting their social assistance benefits.
- ODSP recipients will experience greater flexibility through an annual exemption of \$6,000 in earnings per year instead of the current \$200 per month.
- Benefits will be reduced by 75 cents for each dollar earned above these amounts to encourage recipients to increase their labour force participation and achieve greater financial independence.
- All employment supports from social services will be integrated with Employment Ontario to improve outcomes for people with disabilities.

The LIFT and Care Tax-Credit

- Starting with the 2019 tax year the Government will be introducing the Ontario Low-Income Individuals and Families Tax, called "LIFT" credit as well as the Ontario Childcare Access and Relief from Expenses tax credit, called "CARE" credit
- Both tax credits will provide Personal Income Tax relief to eligible working individuals and families, including those transitioning to employment from social assistance.
- For low- and moderate-income families, the Ontario Child Benefit will increase with the cost of living on July 1 from a maximum benefit of \$1,403 to \$1,434 per child per year.

4. Auto-Insurance and Driver Care Plan

We are receptive towards the Government's New Auto Insurance Strategy presented in the budget. Budget 2019 lays out the blueprint for lowering auto-insurance premiums and putting drivers first especially people hurt in auto collisions who need more time to recover bringing greater credibility and accountability to the medical assessment process.

Key Budget Highlights:

- Implementation of a new "Driver Care Plan" which will streamline access to care by providing important information to make the claim process easier to navigate;



- A “Care, Not Cash” default clause to ensure that a driver’s auto insurance coverage will pay for treatment while giving the driver the option to be eligible to receive cash statements if they choose
- An improved early treatment system for common injuries, including mental health treatment;
- A return to the default benefit limit of \$2 million for those who are catastrophically injured in an accident, after it was previously reduced to \$1 million in 2016.