



February 23, 2007

Backgrounder

JOHN TORY'S PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE PLAN FOR AUTISM

Progressive Conservative Party Leader John Tory announced today that if elected, a PC government would take the following action to help parents and children dealing with autism.

1. CLEAR THE WAITLIST

- Clear the current wait list for autism treatment for children under the age of six by providing direct funding immediately for every child on the waitlist.
- Anyone currently on the waitlist would be offered direct funding immediately.
- Direct funding to clear the wait list would cost approximately \$70 million per year (based on 1,400 children on the waitlist receiving up to \$50,000 in direct funding per year).

2. PARTNER WITH EDUCATION SYSTEM, SUPPORT WORKERS

- Partner with educators, child support workers and school boards to ensure that upon reaching school age, children with autism have the supports they need – including, when recommended by a qualified professional, ABA and IBI - as part of a continuum of services to help these children integrate and succeed.
- The PC Party does not believe in age cutoffs, but rather the right, appropriate and best treatment at any age, as prescribed by an appropriately qualified professional.
- This is why we will ensure that students receive the correct services they need in the public school system, whether ABA, IBI, or other services.
- Seek more transparency within the public school system in relation to the almost \$2 billion allocated to special needs children. We will work with school boards, teachers and their representative organizations to ensure appropriately qualified professionals are in the schools to guide and deliver services and programs.
- Adopt international standards to accredit those who provide educational supports for children with autism.
- Invest in our college and university system so that it can meet all of these standards, and ensure we have adequate supply of accredited trained professionals here in Ontario.

3. FLEXIBILITY AND CHOICE FOR PARENTS

- Give parents the option of whether to use regional service providers for autism therapy or take direct funding for accredited outside providers instead.
- Once a medical professional makes a diagnosis of autism, immediately provide funding for a clinical assessment to ensure no child is left waiting.

4. STREAMLINE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

- Currently services are ad-hoc and poorly integrated. Funding and initiatives are announced in a piecemeal fashion and give little long-term comfort to parents of children with autism needing stability and transparency in the service delivery system.
- The John Tory plan would streamline services, give increased availability of direct funding options throughout the system, and improve the assessment and regulatory environment to ensure easier access to the appropriate service, at any age. Our will ensure continuity and stability of funding to match the streamlined delivery of services.
- Ensure everyone in the continuum of care (from regional providers to children's treatment centres, other service providers, schools and, most importantly, parents) are on the same page so that children, whatever their age, have the supports they need.

5. EXPAND RESPITE PROGRAMS

- Parents and children with autism must have the opportunity engage the broader community and develop other experiences.
- Respite is very important to families and children with autism. There are currently long waitlists for these programs, we will invest an additional \$ 5 million annually to give parents the respite support they need.

DALTON MCGUINTY'S RECORD ON AUTISM

Days before the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty wrote the parent of a child with autism and promised to give them the "support and treatment they need. That includes children over the age of six." Like so many of his other promises, Dalton McGuinty completely ignored this one.

Since the last election, not only has the McGuinty government ignored Dalton McGuinty's written commitment – they have actively stood in the way.

- There is no transparency on how government funds for autism are being spent. Concerned parents of children with autism have to fill out contentious Freedom of Information requests just to get simple answers. Further, the Auditor General himself has been critical that the lack of transparency on government autism supports may undermine people's trust.
- When the federal government announced a Registered Disability Fund for parents of children with special needs and called on the provinces for support – Ontario failed to do so.
- The McGuinty government went through the motions of establishing an autism advisory committee to make public recommendations by the end of January 2007 but already two deadlines for this report have come and gone and parents are as in the dark as ever. This report should be made public now.

- Not only did Dalton McGuinty fail to provide available and necessary supports for children with autism as he promised, he actually took their parents to court to defend his right not to do so.
- McGuinty failed to introduce IBI and ABA capacity into the public school system.