



**Mennonite  
Central  
Committee**

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26 August 2019

The Honourable Todd Smith  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor St., 6th Floor, Hepburn Block  
Toronto, ON  
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Dear Minister Smith,

As a relief development and peace organization, working in the province for close to 100 years, we remain committed to walking along side individuals in our communities that are marginalised and disregarded. This includes various low-income populations such as refugees, homeless, as well as people struggling with mental health, addictions and disabilities. Over the years we have witnessed that poverty exacerbates the isolation and marginalization that vulnerable people with disabilities face and that meaningful participation, social roles and relationships, foster healthy individuals and communities.

We are particularly concerned about the Ontario government's plan to change the definition of disability in the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

In November 2018, then-Minister of Community and Social Services, Lisa MacLeod announced plans to align the definition of disability with "federal government guidelines". If this change proceeds MCC is concerned it would threaten the health and well-being of many vulnerable people who need the income and health benefits of the current ODSP.

When completing the current ODSP application forms, health care providers must confirm that a patient has a physical or mental impairment that is continuous or reoccurring; will last for at least one year; and impacts their ability to work, participate in the community or take care of themselves.

In contrast, federal programs, like the Canada Pension-Disability (CPP-D), are much more restrictive. CPP-D restricts eligibility to those with a severe and prolonged mental or physical disability due to a medical condition that means they cannot work, and whose disability will last a long time or result in death. All other federal disability benefit programs are as or more restrictive.

If the Ontario government proceeds with the plan to align the ODSP definition with federal definitions, many poor people with disabilities will not qualify for ODSP and will have to rely on the Ontario Works (OW) program. This would leave low-income people with episodic disabilities (such as MS, mental health disabilities, rheumatoid arthritis, hepatitis C, chronic pain) and time-limited disabilities (such as most breast cancers) relying on a program that provides almost 40% less income and more limited health-related supports. This is especially inappropriate given that ODSP is already a "last resort" disability benefit program.

*Relief, development and peace in the name of Christ*

*Many of MCCO's program participants are on ODSP. Their disabilities range from physical and mental health disabilities to developmental disabilities. Their ODSP payments are crucial to their maintaining stable housing and to prevent their return to homelessness. Looking toward the future, we know that other people have disabilities that might not make them eligible for ODSP if the definition were based on the more restrictive federal definition.*

MCC is concerned that this proposed change would push very poor people with disabilities in Ontario into deeper poverty, increased stress, worse health and more homelessness. Negative outcomes like these will put further pressure on the healthcare system, hallway medicine, social services and other parts of government, costing more over the longer term.

MCC asks you to defend disability and keep the current ODSP definition of disability. Do not move to a more restrictive definition that would threaten the health and well-being of vulnerable people with disabilities in Ontario. We ask you to make sure ODSP stays accessible to all who need it.

Sincerely



John Head  
Executive Director

c.c.

Hon. Paul Calandra, MPP Markham-Stouffville  
Andrea Horwath, MPP Hamilton Centre, Leader Official Opposition  
Lisa Gretzky, MPP, Critic Community and Social Services  
Gilles Bisson, MPP Timmins  
Jeff Burch, MPP Niagara Centre  
Mike Harris, MPP Kitchener-Conestoga  
Laura Mae Lindo, MPP Kitchener Centre  
Suze Morrison, MPP Toronto Centre  
Rick Nicholls, MPP Chatham-Kent-Leamington  
Jennifer Stevens, MPP St. Catharines