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Government not in it for children with autism

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Every year in Ontario we recognize April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day, a day to show support and inclusion for those living with Autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), also known as Autism, is a life-long neurological disorder that affects the way a person communicates and relates to the people and world around them.

Autism diagnoses are on the rise and in Canada alone, 1 in 94 children are diagnosed with Autism, with approximately 100,000 Ontarians living with Autism.

During my time as a member of the Select Committee on Developmental Services, we heard that there is wide variation in the services and supports available to people with Autism depending on where they live in the province.

In the Select Committee's Final Report we recommended there be a coordinated provincial strategy to address Autism through appropriate support services for individuals in all communities and regions, including: access to early diagnosis and interventions; professional accreditation for autism service providers; and consistent evaluations and benchmarks for implementing of Autism therapeutic interventions.

In 2014-2015 there were 16,158 children with Autism on the waitlist for intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) and applied behavioural analysis (ABA) therapy. However, only 10,817 children are receiving ABA and IBI therapy from the province. This is unacceptable.

Instead of finding ways to provide the necessary support to the thousands waiting for therapy the government has decided that children older than five will be ineligible to receive IBI therapy.

Rather, families with children over the age of five with Autism will receive a one-time $8,000 payment from the government to find their own support.

Many families have been waiting for years to receive the necessary help their child deserves. In the Auditor General's 2013 Annual Report, it found that due to long waitlists, children often do not start IBI therapy until nearly the age of seven.

Now the government has completely shut the door on these families. The government's decision goes against the very principle of inclusion.

Autism doesn't end at five and no child should be left behind in receiving the necessary support they deserve.

I have asked the Minister during Question Period to reverse her decision and I will continue to pressure the Minister to provide real support instead of making life harder for children with ASD.