



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WATERLOO REGION DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES AGENCIES FACING FUNDING SHORTFALLS WHILE FAMILIES FACE LONG WAITLISTS FOR CRITICAL SUPPORTS

Over 1,500 persons with developmental disabilities on the wait list for supported living, community support and crisis placement across Waterloo Region

KITCHENER, ON | FEBRUARY 5, 2025 – The nine-member agencies of the Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council of Waterloo Region (DSPAC) are calling on the provincial government to address the growing demand for essential programs and services, and long waitlists for developmental services supports in our community. The crushing demand for services, evidenced by unacceptably long provincial waitlists, continues to worsen due to chronic underfunding and resulting inadequate service capacity.

Since 1993, core funding across developmental services has risen by less than seven per cent, while the cost of living has increased by over 60 per cent. Without urgent immediate investment, the strain on families, caregivers, and service agencies in Waterloo Region will only worsen.

“The developmental services sector is a lifeline enabling people with developmental disabilities to thrive in their communities while also providing essential supports and caregiver relief for families,” said Brian Swainson, CEO of Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services. “Families in Waterloo Region are currently left to navigate an overburdened system, with excessive wait times exacting intolerable stress and uncertainty on them and their loved ones.”

Currently, there are 716 people on the waitlist for supportive housing options across Waterloo Region, with the local sector already at capacity with 741 people in group, supportive and independent inclusive living placements. With only a handful of local housing placement opportunities becoming available each year, this often translates to five, 10 or over 15 years of uncertainty for waitlisted individuals and their families.

“The waitlists underscore the urgent need for immediate action,” said Ann Bilodeau, CEO of KW Habilitation Services. “Families across Waterloo Region are being forced into crisis situations, especially while awaiting supportive housing options for their loved ones while service providers are already stretched thin. We need immediate action to ensure that people in our community get the support they deserve.”

Nearly 1,200 individuals in Waterloo Region are currently waitlisted for community supports—essential programs that help individuals with developmental disabilities stay engaged in their communities while providing relief for caregivers. These include day programs, overnight respite, recreational activities, skills development, employment and vocational training, autism services, and behavioural supports. Often serving as a lifeline, these services help prevent family breakdown caused by caregiver burnout.

“The gap in supports for individuals with developmental disabilities isn’t just a statistic—for my family and others like mine, it was a daily reality,” said Sue Simpson, parent of an adult having a developmental disability. “Living with the constant fear of an unknown future, families face caregiver burnout, financial strain, and emotional stress due to long waitlists for support. Families shouldn’t have to wait for a crisis, such as my family experienced, to access vital services when timely support could prevent hardship and create a healthier, stronger community for all.”

The #WaitingToBelong campaign led by Community Living Ontario and OASIS highlights the devastating impact of long waitlists, leaving individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families in limbo for years—sometimes decades—without essential supports. The campaign urges immediate government investment to prevent further crises and ensure access to housing, employment, and community connections.

“We know and appreciate the investments that have been made in the Developmental Services sector,” said Swainson. “However, there are still 52,000 adults waitlisted for services, as well as thousands more children and youth having complex needs stuck on waitlists, leaving families struggling without the vital services they require. We need to deal with over 30 years of chronic funding shortfalls to adequately address the critical waitlist situation.”

Waterloo Region’s developmental services organizations, alongside #WaitingToBelong and sector partners across Ontario, are calling on the provincial government to act now.

For more information, please visit <https://communitylivingontario.ca/waiting-to-belong/>.

ABOUT DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES PLANNING & ADVISORY COUNCIL OF WATERLOO REGION

The Developmental Services Planning & Advisory Council of Waterloo Region (DSPAC) is a network of local organizations committed to advocating for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. DSPAC works collaboratively to address critical issues within the developmental services sector, and advocates for improved resources and services to ensure individuals with developmental disabilities receive the care and support they need to live fulfilling, independent lives within their communities.

Member Organizations:

- Aldaview Services (Beverly Hagedorn, Executive Director)
- Community Living Cambridge (Lawna Paulos, Executive Director)
- DeafBlind Ontario Services (Amanda Mesko, Community Engagement Manager)
- Elmira District Community Living (Cheryl Peterson, Executive Director)
- Karis Disability Services (Sharon Dam, Area Manager)
- Extend-A-Family Waterloo Region (Allan Mills, Executive Director)
- KW Habilitation Services (Ann Bilodeau, Chief Executive Officer)
- Parents for Community Living KW Inc. (Katherine Loveys, Chief Executive Officer)
- Sunbeam Community & Developmental Services (Brian Swainson, Chief Executive Officer)

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ADDITIONAL QUOTES:

“It should not be at the whim of any government to determine who gets, who doesn’t, and when. The province’s books should not be balanced on the backs of its most vulnerable citizens. While we are grateful the government provided a modest increase in the last budget, it doesn’t even begin to address the seriousness of our current situation. We must do better.” — Chris Beesley, CEO of Community Living Ontario.

“This chronic underfunding leaves agencies struggling to provide the critical services on which people with intellectual disabilities and their families depend. The gap forces families to shoulder more of the burden — financially, emotionally, and physically — just to meet basic needs. Is this the Ontario we want to live in, where families are left to bridge the growing divide between what’s needed and what’s funded?” — Robert Walsh, CEO of Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs (OASIS).