

To: Executive Director(s), Manager(s) of one of our selection of Ontario Social Enterprises

Dear Director, Dear Manager,

We are writing on behalf of the ODSP Action Coalition and of the Coalition's Earnings and Employment Support Committee to ask you to take action to oppose two upcoming changes to ODSP and Ontario Works (OW).

Our Coalition is made up of service providers and ODSP recipients and we advocate for improvements to the policies that affect the income security of people living with disabilities. Among us, 37,000 are able to work part-time or episodically full-time depending on our conditions (see 1 below).

You are at the helm of one of Ontario's social enterprises. You might be one of our employers and witness firsthand how OW and ODSP recipients still struggle on a system that keeps us largely under Ontario's poverty line. Your mission statements are living proof that you advocate for us every second of your workday and we are certain that you have also voiced your commitment to social justice in other ways.

Described in details below, the upcoming changes will only increase income *insecurity* for people living with disabilities. They are a great concern to our coalition's members as well as legal workers, doctors, nurses, academics and disability and poverty rights advocates (see 2).

Please join us in this timely and critical Call to Action:

THE ACTIONS:

1. Please send a letter to Minister Todd Smith, voicing your opposition to the upcoming change of the ODSP definition of disability and to the upcoming increase of the claw-backs on earnings. You can use the template letter that we have attached. Hon. Todd Smith was the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. He is now responsible for ODSP and OW as the new Minister for Children, Community and Social Services, since June 20, 2019.
2. Please encourage other social entrepreneurs and your sponsors to contact Minister Smith, too.

THE RATIONALE:

The ODSP definition of disability will be narrowed down this fall. According to the latest information, it will then be limited to "severe and prolonged" impairment. This means: a) exclusion from ODSP for a substantial number of future applicants who can participate in the workforce despite their disabilities (see 3) and b) a higher probability of the expulsion of current ODSP recipients at their next medical review (see 4). In both cases, individuals who can work are more at risk, including those with episodic disability, such as MS, cancer, HIV, trauma and mental health diagnoses. They will have to revert to OW, which will mean surviving with an allowance that is 37% less and with earnings that are clawed back even more than by ODSP. An ODSP recipient earning \$850/month now lives with a total of \$1,794/month. On the future OW system, they will have to live with \$1,170.5 instead (see 5).

Adding to this destabilizing prospect, the claw-backs on earnings will increase from 50 to 75% for both ODSP and OW. From any dollar earned beyond \$300 per month for OW earners and beyond \$6,000 per year for ODSP earners, we will be allowed to keep only 25 cents. Those earning \$14 per hour will then, in real terms, be paid \$3.50 per hour. An employee on ODSP earning \$850 per month will be allowed to keep only \$587.50. An employee on OW earning \$850 per month will be allowed to keep only \$437.50 (see 6). This will be equivalent to paying 31% to 49% in taxes to "support" our own support programs. These claw-backs are very high compared to other provinces (see 7) and very demoralizing. We have enough struggles without these surcharges and the fear of expulsion from ODSP while not able to sustain ourselves.

The change of definition and the increase in the claw-backs are cruel austerity measures when combined with: the cuts in legal aid, new regulations that make the government immune to most lawsuits (see 8), the uncertain status of the Work-Related Benefit worth \$100 per month and the fact that the changes were decided without any input from persons with lived experience (see 9).

These are profound value and policy shifts that fray our social fabric, impede poverty reduction and erode inclusive employment initiatives like yours. They threaten our health, work and housing. They signal we are *not* valuable workers, consumers and community members. Those in the front lines of advocacy are already experiencing high levels of stress and an exacerbation of their conditions.

We thank you for your business choices, and for believing in us. Please accept to take the actions we suggest.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at odsaction.employment.4.2019@gmail.com.

Sincerely,
[via email]
Kyle Vose & Andrea Hatala
Co-chairs, ODSP Action Coalition

(1) Social assistance trends: ODSP

(2) Ontario Budget 2019 Announces \$1 Billion in OW and ODSP Cuts
Changing disability definition a dangerous mistake that will harm thousands
'How will they eat?' Alarm raised over revamp of Ontario's welfare program for disabled
Defend Disability
Cuts to legal aid mean worse health for vulnerable people
Benefit for Children To Be Cut from OW/ODSP
There is nothing compassionate about Minister MacLeod's announcement: Ontario's cuts to social assistance will hurt the most vulnerable in Ontario
Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts
Canada considers a basic income guarantee: can it achieve health for all?
Landmark study links Tory austerity to 120,000 deaths

(3) The co-chairs of our Coalition have been informed that the model that the MCCSS has chosen is one that defines disability as a "severe and prolonged" impairment and is inspired by the definition of disability used by CPP-D despite the fact that CPP-D is a disability insurance, not an income security program like ODSP. To qualify for the CPP-D benefits, one must have contributed to the insurance plan before and, one must "demonstrate that their physical or mental disability prevents them from working regularly at any job that is substantially gainful, and that it is long-term and of indefinite duration or is likely to result in death."

Approval rates for CPP-D are very low.

(4) Dr Roy on grand-parenting

(5) Under the current system, an ODSP recipient earning \$850/month lives with a total of \$1169 (allowance) + \$100 (Work Related Benefit) + \$200 (earning exemption) + \$325 (left over earning after clawback) = \$1,794.

Under the future system, this same person pushed onto the OW system would have to live with \$733 (OW allowance) + \$300 (exemption) + \$137.5 = 1170.5

(6) With the 75% clawback and from a \$850 earning, ODSP recipients will keep: \$500 (earning exemption) + [\$850-\$500] x 0.25 (left over earning after the clawback) = \$588. Clawed back: \$262.50.

With the 75% clawback and from a \$850 earning, OW recipients will keep: \$300 (earning exemption) + [\$850-\$300] x 0.25 (left over earning after clawback) = \$437.5. Clawed back: \$412.50

(7) Welfare in Canada

(8) Ontario PCs Pass Budget Bill That Makes Government Immune To Most Lawsuits
Schedule 17

(9) Freedom of Information Request