

SPECIAL NEEDS STRATEGY UPDATE

Dear *Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of Family Member Currently in Service/Waiting for Service,*

As a family whose child may be receiving or waiting for rehabilitation services (speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy), we are writing to provide you with an update on upcoming improvements to the delivery of children's rehabilitation services in your community.

As you may know, in 2014 the government launched the Special Needs Strategy in response to feedback received from families to improve the timeliness, effectiveness and coordination of the services that children and youth with special needs require to fully participate at home, at school, in the community and to achieve goals for adulthood.

A key initiative of the Special Needs Strategy is the integrated delivery of rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology, for children and youth from birth to school exit.

Over the past year, service providers – including community-based Preschool Speech and Language providers, District School Boards, Community Care Access Centres and Children's Treatment Centres – in communities across the province have worked to develop locally integrated, family-centred ways to deliver children's rehabilitation services to improve family service experiences and outcomes for children and youth with special needs. In doing so, service providers have engaged with families and youth in our communities to seek their input.

What is Changing?

Once the improvements are implemented, children and youth with rehabilitation service needs and their families will have:

- A seamless service experience from birth to school exit, with no gaps in service as children transition to school or between service providers;
- Child, youth and family centred service as parents and children/youth work together with service providers and educators to set goals based on their individual needs and strengths;
- Access to a broad range of high quality interventions (classroom, parent training, educator consultation) in settings that are most appropriate to their needs, and as convenient as possible to families; and
- Continuous and consistent services throughout the calendar year regardless of who delivers them in the community.

Following the ministries' review of initial local proposals, service providers are now beginning to refine their proposals based on consultation with stakeholders. Based on feedback gathered, they will then begin to develop local plans for implementation of their new local models for the integrated delivery of rehabilitation services in each community.

When Will These Changes Take Place?

These changes will be phased in so that they will not disrupt any services your child may currently be receiving in the community or school. Families currently waiting for services will maintain their place on the waitlist. There will be no reduction in service capacity as a result of this change. Implementation of new service delivery models is expected to begin as early as Fall 2018.

We will continue to work together across service providers in the community to ensure that there will be no gaps in services for your child and that any changes will be seamless for you and your family.

How Can I Get More Information?

We will continue to keep you informed as the new model is developed in your community. For more information or if you have any questions, please contact: Bluewater District School Board: Lisa Emke, Learning Services Administrator (519) 363-2014 extension 2062.

KEY MESSAGES:

- In 2014 the government launched the Special Needs Strategy to improve the timeliness, effectiveness and coordination of the services that children and youth with special needs require to fully participate at home, at school, and in the community, and to achieve their goals for adulthood.
- A key initiative of the Special Needs Strategy is the integrated delivery of rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology, for children and youth from birth to school exit.
- The ministries of Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Education, and Health and Long-Term Care have worked with service providers in communities across the province to develop locally integrated ways to deliver these rehabilitation services to improve family service experience and outcomes for children and youth with special needs.
- Communities across the province are developing family-centred models so that families can access information and self-refer for rehabilitation services through clear access points. There will be no additional waits or transition points as children move from preschool services to school-aged services, and children will experience continuous and consistent services throughout the calendar year regardless of who delivers them in the community.
- The ministries are continuing to work with local service delivery partners through the Steering Committees in each community with the intention to move forward to finalize their local proposals after consultations with stakeholders. Based on feedback gathered, they will then begin to develop local plans for integrated rehabilitation services. There will be no reduction in service capacity as a result of these changes.
- Changes will take effect outside of the school year so that no children currently receiving services will experience gaps in service provision. Families currently waiting for services will maintain their place on the waitlist. Implementation of new service delivery models is expected to begin as early as Fall 2018.
- We will continue to work together so that the changes do not cause disruption for you and your family, so that there is no reduction in rehabilitation service capacity, and so that you are kept informed and supported during the transition to the new service delivery model.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR FAMILIES CURRENTLY RECEIVING/WAITING FOR SERVICES:

Q1. What is the Special Needs Strategy?

- A1. The Special Needs Strategy was launched in 2014 by the ministries of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Community and Social Services (MCSS), Education (EDU) and Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), in response to feedback the government received from families and service providers about the need to improve outcomes and service experiences for children and youth with special needs and their families.

The vision of the Special Needs Strategy is “an Ontario where children and youth with special needs get the timely and effective services they need to participate fully at home, at school, in the community, and as they prepare to achieve their goals for adulthood.”

The strategy is focused on improving services for children and youth with special needs and their families by:

- Improving the early identification of special needs in children through a new **developmental surveillance process** to help identify early signs or risks of delays;
- **Coordinated service planning processes** for children with multiple and/or complex special needs so families can access a range of services and supports;
- **Integrated delivery of rehabilitation services** so children have access to speech-language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services delivered seamlessly from birth to the end of school.

As a result, families with children/youth with special needs will experience earlier identification of concerns, seamless services, clear access and service plans, and smooth transitions, without having to tell their stories over and over again.

Q2. What is the Integrated Delivery of Rehabilitation Services?

- A2. A key initiative of the Special Needs Strategy is the Integrated Delivery of Rehabilitation Services, including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology, for children and youth from birth to school exit.

As a result of these changes, children and youth with special needs and their families will receive rehabilitation services that are seamless from birth through school exit throughout the calendar year, built around their goals for home, school and the community and delivered in the way and in the place that meets the needs of the child and family.

The government is working with service providers in 34 communities across the province to develop locally integrated ways to deliver these rehabilitation services. These services are currently delivered by community-based Preschool Speech and Language providers, District School Boards, Community Care Access Centres, and Children’s Treatment Centres, and children and families often experience gaps between services or uncertainty about where and how to access services.

Communities across the province are developing family-centred models of service provision so that families can access information and self-refer for rehabilitation services through clear access points, and services are provided seamlessly from birth to school exit.

This means that children who are transitioning from preschool services to school-aged services will not have to go on additional waitlists, and children will experience continuous and consistent services regardless of who delivers them in the community.

Implementation of new service delivery models is expected to begin as early as Fall 2018.

Q3. Why is the current system changing?

- A3. Families and service providers identified several challenges with the current service delivery system, including gaps or disruptions in service provision upon school entry, or different program eligibility and referral requirements for different programs.

The goal is for families to experience rehabilitation services as a seamless, single program, where children and youth with special needs and their families receive rehabilitation services that are seamless from birth through school exit throughout the calendar year, built around their goals for home, school and the community and delivered in the way and in the place that meets the needs of the child and family. Seamless service delivery means a continuous and unbroken service experience for the child/youth and their family as long as they require service. It involves continuity of supports, information and intervention over time and across transition points.

Q4. What will this mean for my child receiving Preschool Speech & Language services?

- A4. The ministries are continuing to work with local service delivery partners through the Steering Committees in each community with the intention to move forward to finalize their local proposals after consultations with stakeholders. Based on feedback gathered, they will then begin to develop local plans for integrated rehabilitation services.

If your preschool-aged child is currently receiving preschool speech and language services, they will not need to reapply for speech and language services or receive additional assessments when they begin school.

There will be no additional waits or transition points as children move from preschool services to school-aged services, and children will experience continuous and consistent service regardless of who delivers them in the community. We are committed to ensuring that there is no disruption in services and we will continue to work together across service providers in the community to ensure that any changes are seamless for you and your family, and that you are supported during the transition to the new service delivery model.

Q5. What will this mean for my child receiving services in publicly funded schools?

- A5. The ministries are continuing to work with local service delivery partners through the Steering Committees in each community with the intention to move forward to finalize their local proposals after consultations with stakeholders. Based on feedback gathered, they will then begin to develop local plans for integrated rehabilitation services.

To support implementation of continuous, consistent and locally integrated ways to deliver children's rehabilitation services, this plan may include changes to service providers for children receiving services in publicly funded schools. These changes will take effect outside of the school year so that children will not experience gaps in service during the school year. These changes will not affect families with children receiving or waiting for rehabilitation services in-home or in private schools.

With these changes, there will be no additional waits or transition points as children move from preschool services to school-aged services, and children will experience continuous and consistent services across providers. Families currently waiting for services will maintain their place on the waitlist.

We are committed to ensuring that there is no disruption in services and we will continue to work together across service providers in the community to ensure that any changes are seamless for you and your family, and that you are supported during the transition to the new service delivery model.

If families have any questions about the delivery of services in publicly funded schools, we would encourage you to speak with your child's school principal.

Q6. What will this mean for my child receiving services from a Children's Treatment Centre?

- A6. The ministries are continuing to work with local service delivery partners through the Steering Committees in each community with the intention to move forward to finalize their local proposals after consultations with stakeholders. Based on feedback gathered, they will then begin to develop local plans for integrated rehabilitation services.

If your child is currently receiving rehabilitation services from a Children's Treatment Centre, they will not need to reapply for these services or receive unnecessary assessments.

There will be no additional waits or transition points as children move from preschool services to school-aged services and children will experience continuous and consistent services regardless of who delivers them in the community.

We will continue to work together across service providers in the community to ensure that any changes are seamless for you and your family, and that you are kept informed and supported during the transition to the new service delivery model.

Q7. What will this mean for children with a developmental disability who are transitioning into adulthood?

- A7. Integrated Transition Planning does not replace the Ministry of Education's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or processes associated with IEPs. For young people with developmental disabilities preparing for adulthood, the integrated rehabilitation process is expected to align with the IEP process and Integrated Transition Planning (ITP).

Where applicable, the integrated transition planning process will include the family, youth, school-aged rehabilitation service providers, school staff and adult developmental service organizations (e.g., Developmental Service Ontario). The transition planning process will consider the young person's goals for work, further education and community living and the steps needed to attain these goals. Transition planning does not guarantee eligibility for or availability of adult developmental or other services.

Q8. How can I get more information?

- A8. Service providers in your community will keep you informed as new models are developed. For further information, please contact your service provider agency or send an email to specialneedsstrategy@ontario.ca for response from the ministries.