



December 8, 2020

Dr. Jill Andrew

MPP, Toronto-St. Paul's
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Toronto, ON M6C 1B9
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RE: Financial Assistance to OW and ODSP Recipients to have Basic Virtual Support

Dear Dr. Andrew,

Request: On behalf of the Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST) we respectfully request that Directives be given to Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Directors and Administrators to provide financial assistance for basic virtual support including, but not limited to, data charges, for those in receipt of ODSP and OW.

Reason for Request: To fulfill a need for those who are financially vulnerable to participate in and access resources through virtual means during this pandemic and beyond.

COVID-19 has increased the barriers people on social assistance face. This includes many of the people living with the effects of brain injury that BIST serves.

A Brain Injury can have devastating effects on a person's life, including their day-to-day activities, ability to participate in a social network, and/or find and maintain employment. Brain Injuries can impact a person's cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, sleep, pain levels and mental health.

Not having the financial capacity to access technology puts brain injury survivors and many others at increased risk of social isolation, diminished mental health and denies them access to care that is currently only being offered virtually.

Currently, recipients of OW and ODSP do not have access to funds to pay for this service that has become essential during the Pandemic.

The safety and well being of recipients and their families' rests on their ability to access information and virtually attend support programs, medical appointments and other necessary supports.

Technology also provides the opportunity to improve access to services by removing the limitations of geographic location, health status, financial constraints and cognitive/physical barriers. During Covid-19 the lowest risk activities for everyone are virtually-based activities, events and gatherings where individuals remain physically distant while connecting virtually.

Currently: Under the current Ontario Works Legislation, there are no directives that give the Administrator authority to pay for internet expenses to support those with brain injuries and other disabilities.

As per Ontario Works Directive 7.4: Employment and Participation Benefits, internet costs could be supported under Employment-Related Expenses. However, it is clear that in order to be eligible, the recipient must be participating in employment assistance activities. Unfortunately, many people with disabilities are not employed and therefore cannot access internet costs under this directive.

Ontario Works Directive 7.7: Other Benefits states that discretionary funding is not intended to cover costs associated with ongoing payments. Funding may be provided to cover one-time exceptional costs at the discretion of the Administrator. Therefore, monthly internet costs could not be supported.

We respectfully suggest that this Directive can be amended to include an exception – that internet costs (which are not a one-time cost) to be included in the Discretionary Fund Directive. We understand that the OW Regulations may need to be amended to allow the Directive to be followed. It is our further request that the monthly cost of the internet would be included in any future changes to Legislation as it relates to discretionary benefits.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to our office if you require any further information.

Sincerely,



Melissa Vigar
Executive Director
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