



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
THE SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.



For Immediate Release

Mental Health Advocates Welcome Increases to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) Program

March 23, 2006 (Toronto) - According to several organizations that represent individuals who are unable to work because of disability caused by severe mental illness, today's budget is a move in the right direction but inadequate to meet the needs of one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario and the Ontario Psychiatric Association, Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario and Community Living Ontario noted that the 3% increase in the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) announced today by The Honourable Dwight Duncan means that individuals in Ontario who are not able to work because of disabilities have now received a cumulative increase in income of 6% over 13 years or less 0.5% per year. This sum is well below the increase in the cost of living and has resulted in the disabled suffering a progressive decline into poverty.

"The poverty line for a single person living in a large urban centre is just over \$19,000 per year." said Ursula Lipski, Director of Policy and Research for the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario. "With the newly announced increase, a single person with disabilities living on ODSP will receive just under \$12,000 per year: a mere 63% of the poverty line." Indeed the rates fall short of meeting the cost of both rent and food as measured by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and by the Nutritious Food Basket guidelines."

"Living in poverty and constantly worrying about how you are going to pay rent and utilities while putting food on the table is a stress that can cause relapse of many psychiatric illnesses." said Dr. Richard O'Reilly of the Ontario Psychiatric Association. "My colleagues and I are increasingly encountering cases where the financial stress and poverty caused by trying to live on our Province's disability benefits has been the primary cause of relapse of serious mental disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder."

Our mental health organizations are calling for increases to ODSP to ensure that Ontario's most vulnerable citizens, those who cannot work because of disability, can meet their basic need for food, shelter and clothing. We will continue to work with and call on the Government to provide disability benefits at a level equivalent to that received in 1993 before they were frozen.

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Endorsed by: Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, and Community Living Ontario