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**Attention News Editors:**
**Psychiatrists, People with Mental Illness and their Families Fight for Increases to the Ontario Disability Support Program**

TORONTO, Jan. 27 /CNW/ - The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario and the Ontario Psychiatric Association are calling for a 10% increase to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) in the spring provincial budget. This request is a key component of their joint advocacy effort called The Financial Dignity for Ontarians with Disabilities Campaign.

ODSP is Ontario's financial safety net for people with disabilities who are unable to work, including people with severe mental illnesses. "However, this safety net has many holes, and the biggest is that ODSP benefit rates are well below the poverty line", said Ursula Lipski, Director of Policy and Research of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario.

"As someone living with schizophrenia on ODSP, I face the constant challenge of living on a tight budget. I need to ration food and milk very carefully so that I am not left with a shortfall at the end of the month. I rarely have money to get out of my apartment and socialize, which leaves me feeling isolated and inhibits my recovery," said Chris Whittaker, volunteer at the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario.

The poverty line for a single person living in a large urban centre is just over \$19,000 per year. Yet single people with disabilities living on ODSP receive \$11,500 per year, or a paltry 60% of the poverty line.

"The current rates consign people who are unable to work because of severe mental illness to a life of poverty. This in turn increases stress which can actually trigger relapse of psychiatric illness," said Dr. Richard O'Reilly Chair, Advocacy Committee of the Ontario Psychiatric Association. "My colleagues are greatly concerned that many of our patients on ODSP are now unable to provide for their basic needs."

Over one-third (36%) of people receiving ODSP have a psychiatric disability. Approximately 35,000 of those have psychosis related diagnoses such as schizophrenia. According to the World Health Organization, mental illnesses account for five of the ten leading causes of disability in developed countries.

ODSP rates have only increased by 3% since 1993. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario and the Ontario Psychiatric Association are calling on the Ontario Government to increase ODSP rates by 10% in the upcoming budget. Even with this increase, the cumulative raise over the last 13 years will be a mere 1% per annum, well below annual cost of living increases. Correcting the neglect and providing for the basic needs of some of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens must be a priority for the Ontario Government. The 2006 Ontario budget presents this opportunity.

The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is a family based organization providing support, education and advocacy on behalf of people and families affected by schizophrenia. The Ontario Psychiatric Association is the formal professional association for over 700 psychiatrists in the province.

On January 26th and 27th Ontario psychiatrists and members of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario will be promoting the ODSP campaign at the Ontario Psychiatrist Association's Annual Meeting at The Marriott Eaton Centre Toronto Hotel.

For further information: Media contacts: Dr. Richard O'Reilly, MD, FRCPC, Chair, Advocacy Committee, Ontario Psychiatric Association, Tel. (519) 455-5110 Ext. 47240, Cell (519) 859-5821, Email: [roreilly@uwo.ca](mailto:roreilly@uwo.ca);

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**SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO - More on this organization**



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