



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.



January 31, 2006

Standing Committee  
Finance and Economic Affairs  
Room 1405, Whitney Block  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2  
Attention: Trevor Day, Clerk

**Re: Pre-Budget Consultation**

Dear Committee Members,

The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) and the Ontario Psychiatric Association (OPA) appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the Government's pre-budget consultation process.

The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) is a family based organization providing support, education and advocacy on behalf of people and families affected by schizophrenia. With over 1,400 members in 24 volunteer run chapters, SSO is the largest organization representing people affected by schizophrenia in Ontario.

The Ontario Psychiatric Association (OPA) is the formal professional association for psychiatrists in the province. The OPA has a membership consisting of over 700 practicing psychiatrists, retired psychiatrists and psychiatrists in training.

Mental illness affects all Ontarians:

- People of all ages, educational and income levels and cultures experience mental illness
- 1 in 100 Ontarians (approximately 120,000 people) will develop schizophrenia which is generally regarded as the most severed and most debilitating mental illness

According to the World Health Organization, mental illnesses account for five of the ten leading causes of disability in developed countries. Mental illness can severely impact a person's ability to secure and maintain employment. For instance, less than 20% of people with schizophrenia are employed in the competitive market place.

In Ontario over one-third (36%) of people in receipt of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) live with a mental illness. Half of these, approximately 35,000 people, suffer from psychosis related illnesses such as schizophrenia.

ODSP is intended to be Ontario's financial safety net for people with disabilities who are unable to work, including people with severe mental illnesses. ODSP benefit rates however are well below the poverty line. The poverty line for a single person living in a large urban centre is just over \$19,000 per year. Meanwhile, a single person living on ODSP receives \$11,500 per year, or a paltry 60% of the poverty line.

While poverty does not cause severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, many people with mental illness end up living in poverty because their illness deprives them of the ability to work. Poverty, in turn, has the effect of increasing stress on these vulnerable individuals, which can actually trigger relapse of mental illness.

The meager level of financial support provided by the ODSP has consigned people with the most severe cases of mental illness, and therefore disability, to a life of poverty. ODSP benefits have increased by only 3% since 1993. People with disabilities, who have no alternative finances, have been abandoned to deepening poverty. 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 and the Ontario Psychiatric Association urge the Government to increase ODSP rates by 10%. We note that, even after this increase, the cumulative raise over the last 13 years would be a mere 1% per annum, well below increases in the cost of living. It would however be a step towards enabling people in receipt of ODSP to better meet their basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.

We trust that you will be able to incorporate an increase for ODSP into your overall budget recommendations.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Regards,

Dr. Richard O'Reilly, MD, FRCPC  
Chair, Advocacy Committee  
Ontario Psychiatric Association

Mary Alberti  
Executive Director  
Schizophrenia Society of Ontario