



## Policy Paper

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Students with Disabilities: Recognizing and Relieving Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

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## Introduction and Environmental Scan

With the development of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) the provincial government of Canada made a commitment to a barrier-free Ontario by 2025. The AODA outlines a framework in which a series of accessibility standards are to be created, implemented, and enforced for all Ontario institutions, employers, and service providers. The first of these new sets of standards to be adopted by the provincial government was a set of Customer Service standards which came into effect for post-secondary institutions on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010. Other standards relating to Information and Communications, Employment, and the Built Environment are all at various stages of the development process. If Ontario is going to continue to move forward as a province that is inclusive of all abilities, then it is critical that prospective students with disabilities are granted the opportunity to access and succeed in the post-secondary education system.

The 2005 Rae Review on the Ontario post-secondary education system states that of the 13.5% of Ontario residents living with a disability only 12% of that group have university degrees. These Ontarians face an unemployment rate that is twice that of other adults and earn an average income that is only two thirds of what other adults earn.<sup>1</sup> During a time where it has been projected that by 2016 two out of every three new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education,<sup>2</sup> it is not only socially responsible but economically important that students with disabilities be encouraged and aided in the ability to attend post-secondary institutions. This includes making campuses physically accessible, providing learning supports and services associated with individual disabilities, provide support during application and transition, providing support for out of classroom experiences as well as providing students the means to overcome any financial barrier that may be directly or indirectly associated with their individual disabilities.

Currently each Ontario post-secondary institution is required to consult with students, faculty, and staff with disabilities in order to create annual accessibility plans that work towards addressing the needs of persons with disabilities on their campus.<sup>3</sup> These public plans monitor, measure and report on progress that the post-secondary institutions has made in providing support services, accessible and alternative learning materials, and a physically accessible campus overall.<sup>4</sup> The AODA commits the government to creating and enforcing new standards that will require all Ontario post-secondary institutions to become fully accessible to persons with physical and mental disabilities by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.<sup>5</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, OUSA will adhere to the definition of disability as defined by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005:

- (a) *any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,*
- (b) *a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,*
- (c) *a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,*
- (d) *a mental disorder<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Rae, "Ontario; A Leader in Learning," February 2005, pg. 75. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/postsec.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Cameron Ainsworth-Vincze, "What degree will get me a job??" *McLean's Magazine*, March 22, 2007 accessed online at [http://www.macleans.ca/education/universities/article.jsp?content=20070322\\_102427\\_4568](http://www.macleans.ca/education/universities/article.jsp?content=20070322_102427_4568)

<sup>3</sup> Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001. [http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/01o32\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/01o32_e.htm).

<sup>4</sup> COU, "The Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001; Guidelines for the University Sector," October 2002. Online.

<sup>5</sup> Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act, 2005. [http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/05a11\\_e.htm](http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/05a11_e.htm).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## Funding Envelopes and Financial Aid Programs

In Ontario, the support services and resources that are necessary for providing accommodations for students with disabilities are funded through a variety of different sources. In addition to funding allocated by individual institutions, the government of Ontario also administers a number of different funding sources as well. Three of these funding sources are: the “Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities” (AFSD), “Enhanced Services Fund” (ESF), and the “Bursary for Students with Disabilities” (BSWD).<sup>7</sup> There are also a number of other envelopes of funding that specifically target certain types of accommodations, as well as many private grants and bursaries that exist with the intention of reducing barriers for students with disabilities.<sup>8</sup> As diverse as the needs of students with disabilities are, so too are the sources of funding to provide for those needs.

### *The Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities (AFSD)*

The Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities is designed to aid Ontario colleges and universities in accommodating the needs of students with disabilities. Funding is used to cover the costs of counseling, consulting and diagnostic services, technological support, including specially adapted computers and software, tutors, sign-language interpreters, note takers and readers.<sup>9</sup> The AFSD is distributed directly to institutions to supplement the costs of providing necessary services to students with disabilities. The amount of AFSD funding that an institution receives is based on full-time enrolment numbers with an additional top-up provided on the basis of registered students with disabilities. In 2008-2009 the AFSD provided assistance for 36770 students in Ontario.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Enhanced Services Fund (ESF)*

To supplement the costs of centers for students with disabilities, the Enhanced Services Fund provides funding for up to two full-time positions at each publicly-subsidized post-secondary institution. The two types of positions funded by the ESF are learning strategists and assistive technologists with expertise in learning disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

### *Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD)*

Students with disabilities in Ontario that are eligible for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) may also be eligible for the Bursary for Students with Disabilities. This bursary is provided to students to help cover the additional costs of equipment and services related to their participation in post-secondary education that they incur as a result of their disability. Students with disabilities can apply for this bursary through the assistance of centres for students with disabilities or student awards offices across the province. The BSWD covers the cost associated, but not limited to: items or services such as note takers, tutors, special transportation, technical aids/equipment, computers, special chairs and splints.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Community and Social Services, accessed online at <http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/publications/accessibility/canOntLabourMarketAgreement/section3.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), accessed online at <http://www.neads.ca/en/norc/funding/>

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Community and Social Services, accessed online at <http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/publications/accessibility/canOntLabourMarketAgreement/section3.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), accessed online at <http://www.neads.ca/en/norc/funding/page12.php>

## Principles

**Principle One: All willing and qualified students must be guaranteed access to a post-secondary education.**

As a right of “full participation”<sup>13</sup>, all willing, and qualified students must be able to access post-secondary education. It has been projected that by 2016, 70% of the Canadian workforce will require post-secondary education, which is a massive increase from the current 44% of Canadians who currently have a post secondary credential.<sup>14</sup> To this end, it is important that all students including students with disabilities be able to attend post-secondary institutions, including the ability to overcome any financial barriers that may be directly or indirectly associated with disabilities.

**Principle Two: All students with disabilities must be assessed individually to determine proper accommodation and all necessary resources must be provided to fulfill their accommodation requirements.**

To ensure that students with disabilities succeed in their post-secondary education endeavors, it is crucial that they are able to access support services that cater to individualized accommodations. Centres for students with disabilities exist to provide the resources necessary to ensure that students achieve their full academic potential, and to facilitate the development of skills required for independence and self-determination. The necessary resources that a student with a disability will need and use will vary from student to student and can include physical accommodations that are more easily identified and implemented and accommodations that are specific to a student who has a non visible disability. Students with mental disabilities and at risk students are most likely to succeed when assessed, accommodated for, and supported on an individual basis, as no two students are the same. Students who are able to access and benefit from student support services are much more likely to persevere and graduate.<sup>15</sup>

**Principle Three: Students with disabilities must not be burdened with the additional costs related to accessing and participating in post-secondary education due to their disability.**

In order to assure program sustainability, the provincial government must ensure that funds are adequately distributed to post-secondary institutions for the direct funding of initiatives that create an equitable milieu for students with disabilities, including appropriate accommodations. For instance, funding strategies similar to the *Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities*<sup>16</sup>, which genuinely acknowledges and addresses additional financial burdens that students with disability encounter, should be expanded such that post-secondary institution departments and services can expand current programs in order to improve equity and accessibility. This should also allow for the renewal and update of resources and services that students with disabilities require.

For a student with disabilities to be able to access appropriate services within individual institutions and government programs they must be identified as a student with disability by providing appropriate documentation to the individual institutions. Documentation recognized by institutions is very different across the sector, and is very specific based on the individual disability. The provincial government needs to work to recognize the importance of not placing the financial burden of disability assessments, or renewal of assessments on the individual's students with disabilities.

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<sup>13</sup> Ontarians with Disabilities Act, “1.5 Million Ontarians with Disabilities are Counting on You”; accessed online at <http://www.odacommittee.net/factsheet.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Cameron-Ainsworth-Vincze, “what degree will get me a job” *Macleans On Campus*, March 22, 2007; accessed online at <http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2007/03/22/what-degree-will-get-me-a-job/>

<sup>15</sup> Tinto, Vincent. “Taking Student Retention Seriously.” American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. 15 Apr. 2002. Lecture. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, “Assistance for Students with Disabilities”; accessed online at [http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not\\_secure/bswd.htm](http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not_secure/bswd.htm)

**Principle Four: Faculty and staff at post-secondary institutions must be aware of and respect the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and how to properly accommodate them.**

The new regulations within the Customer Services AODA (2005) mandate post-secondary institutions to train faculty and staff on how to properly interact with and be mindful of the different needs that students with disabilities have, and as such, actively work to remove attitudinal barriers while creating an atmosphere conducive to an inclusive learning environment. This includes being respectful of an individual's privacy within a class room, or learning atmosphere, and an understanding of the individuals desire not to be 'left out' or 'singled out.' The focus is on equitable treatment, not special treatment.

**Principle Five: Student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success.**

To ensure that students with disabilities succeed in their post-secondary education endeavors, it is crucial that they are able to access support services that are catered to individualized accommodations. Centers for students with disabilities exist not only to make physical adaptations, but provide the resources necessary to ensure that students achieve their full academic potential, and facilitate the development of skills required for independence and self-determination. Students who are able to access and benefit from student support services are much more likely to persevere and graduate.<sup>17</sup>

**Principle Six: All students should be made aware of and have access to preliminary testing available at universities.**

Students with disabilities wanting to access support services at post-secondary institution should be able to, at no extra cost to the individual student. Currently students with disabilities are asked to present documentation relating to their specific disability; both mental and physical, and to provide information to the post-secondary institutions on the type, severity, and accommodations needed. The type of documentation accepted by individual student support centers differs from campus to campus, and student to student. Most post-secondary institutions have no method of providing assessments on campus for learning disabilities, and identifying at-risk students. Ensuring that students have readily available services on campus to help with assessment of disabilities, and adequately promoting those services are crucial to student success.

**Principle Seven: Adequate information and support must be easily accessible and well publicized to prospective students with disabilities throughout the application process.**

When applying to post-secondary education, students with disabilities require extra support and information to ensure their success in picking the right institution for them. Information needs to be readily available at all University fairs, College fairs, and other post-secondary public information session about application process, student support centers and possible accommodation for students with disabilities. Outside of the usual marketing for post-secondary institutions, students who are not recent graduates of high school should have access to the same information as those who are recently graduated. Outreach programs and support programs for all people with disabilities should include information about post-secondary institutions.

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<sup>17</sup> Tinto, Vincent. "Taking Student Retention Seriously." American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. 15 Apr. 2002. Lecture. 2.

## Concerns

### **Concern One: Students with disabilities face systemic disadvantages in accessing post-secondary education.**

A hallmark of any admirable institution is for its constituent members to genuinely see themselves as an integral and valued part of the community. Unfortunately, this is not yet the reality, as the Rae Report identified that “underrepresented groups such as people with disabilities should be targeted to increase their opportunities for participation in post-secondary education in Ontario”.<sup>18</sup> To this end, the institution’s leadership, values, mission statements, and even promotional materials should be accurately reflective of such inclusive goals.

### **Concern Two: Students with disabilities do not always receive proper accommodation due to insufficient resources available.**

In the history of post-secondary education we have seen the largest population of students with disabilities that were accommodated for were physical disability. The reports published by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities indicated that we are seeing more and more students with mental disabilities, and at-risk students. It stated that there has been an increase of %320 percent of the number of students with disabilities accessing support services, and the data shows that the majority of this population has a non-visible disability.<sup>19</sup>

Accommodations for students with physical disabilities may be evident, and are more easily understood than accommodations for students with non-visible disabilities. Accommodations for students with non-visible disabilities require more time and more resources, as it is often a trial and error process, because no two students are alike. On average, an employee in an access office will manage upwards of 150 students, both with visible and non visible disabilities. Student with visible disabilities require about 1 – 2 visits where as a student with non visible disabilities requires much more intensive resource allocations.<sup>20</sup> With the increase of students with disabilities, and the recognized difference in time and resource allocation, currently many students with non-visible disabilities are unable to access the necessary resources to ensure that they are achieving their full capacity at post-secondary institutions. In the event of space restrictions, creative scheduling solutions and space audits can be performed in order to fully maximize space. Administrative barriers should not prevent functional accommodations

### **Concern Three: Students with disabilities face greater financial burden in accessing and persisting in the post-secondary education system.**

Students with disabilities face a variety of extra expenses related to the accommodation of their disability. The varieties of costs are as unique as the students themselves. For students with disabilities these costs can be barriers to both accessing and persisting through the post-secondary education system.

In recognition of the existence of these extra costs, the Ontario government provides funding through the Bursary for Students with Disabilities. The BSWD will provide up to a total of \$2000 a year to an individual student to cover the costs associated with but not limited to the following: tutoring services, readers, note takers, interpreters (oral and sign), attendant care for studies, talking calculators, tape recorder, vision/learning aids, hearing amplifiers, learning disability assessments, computers and software, special needs accessories for computers, counseling, and specialized chairs.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rae Review, February 2005; accessed online at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/postsec.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, “Disabilities Statistics at Ontario University” 2008

<sup>20</sup> Lisa Rae “University Students and Mental health” *Public Policy and Governance Review Vol. 1 No. 1 Fall 2009*

<sup>21</sup> Ontario Student Assistance Program, access online at [http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not\\_secure/Plan\\_Grants\\_full\\_sepapp\\_BSWD\\_12345.htm](http://osap.gov.on.ca/eng/not_secure/Plan_Grants_full_sepapp_BSWD_12345.htm)

**Concern Four: Not all students with disabilities are able to access the Bursary for Students with Disabilities program because of its continued linkage with Ontario Student Assistance Program.**

There are many students with disabilities that are in need of financial assistance that are not able to access the Bursary for Students with Disabilities because they do not qualify for OSAP. There are currently 36 per cent of students with disabilities that rely on the BSWD funding, but there are an increasing number of students that are ineligible because of the OSAP linkage.<sup>22</sup> If a student is ineligible for OSAP the maximum BSWD the student can receive is \$2000 as opposed to \$10,000. Some of the requirements to qualify for the full amount include conditions that students with disabilities must be taking at least 40% of the full-time course load, have a pre-diagnosed disability, have not defaulted on OSAP and are not overdrawn are eligible.<sup>23</sup> Since the BSWD follows the OSAP criteria, these criteria were not designed to account for the specific needs of students with disabilities, and are not accurate in assessing the needs of students with disabilities. For example, students with health related disabilities or mental disabilities are at a much higher risk of withdrawing from classes or reducing course loads as a result of their individual needs, however there is nothing in the OSAP assessment that accounts for each student's varying situations. The OSAP program expects that students will contribute to the cost of their education, for example through part-time or summer work. Of the students involved in the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) pilot projects, 38 per cent held a paid job while studying.<sup>24</sup> Without taking into account both the student's physical and learning disabilities, it is not an ideal situation for students with disabilities to take on an increased workload, as it may take more time for the completion of the same course material as their peers. The LOTF Report notes that "Concerns about money and lack of access to the BSWD were raised at every student focus group discussion at every institution."

**Concern Five: The Accessibility Fund is inappropriately distributed and is not meeting the needs of students with disabilities in Ontario's post-secondary education system.**

One of the most important issues that are associated with the Accessibility Fund is that the increase of students with disabilities in Ontario's post secondary system has not necessarily been matched by an increase in the amount of funding received. A report from the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities indicates a 320% increase since 1991-1992 in the number of students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions accessing support services. The percentage of university students accessing services within university access offices has increased from 1.12% to 3.8%.<sup>25</sup> Student needs have exceeded the resources that universities have at their disposals.<sup>26</sup>

Additional issues within the Accessibility Fund include the manner through which the funds are distributed. As it currently stands, the majority of money is allocated based on the number of full-time enrollment (FTEs) of each institution and not based on the percentage of students with disabilities attending that institution. This tends to create some problems when the proportion of schools with smaller populations, have a larger percentage of students with disabilities.

**Concern Six: Current full-time status requirements for students with disabilities can be a barrier to accessing scholarships, bursaries, and student services that are not available to part-time students.**

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<sup>22</sup> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, *Open Doors: University Access for Disabled Students* (Toronto: OUSA, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, "Learning Opportunities Task Force: Final Report Summary," 1997 to 2002. pg. 12.

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, "Learning Opportunities Task Force: Final Report Summary," 1997 to 2002. pg. 12.

<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, "Research: University Students and Mental Health," Vol. 1, No. 1, Fall 2009

<sup>26</sup> COU Document.

Currently, students with disability need to take 40% of the full course load to be recognized as 'full-time' students at post-secondary institutions, and by government programs. The generalization that all students with disability are able to complete 40% of the expected course load to receive the benefits of a full time student places prevents many students from accessing scholarships, bursaries, and student services. Some students with disabilities are unable to meet the full-time requirement because of the accommodations needed for their disability. Of no fault of their own they are unable to qualify to access these scholarships, bursaries and students services.

**Concern Seven: Students with disabilities may face barriers that hinder course and program selection due to temporal and geographical inaccessibility.**

Given the age of some post-secondary institutions, coupled with the reality that newer facilities have deferred maintenance costs, there exists accessibility and mobility barriers that rendering campuses as not fully accessible. In addition, beyond physical barriers, temporal barriers may exists in that certain courses may only be offered at a particular time of day which is not conducive to retention and learning for students with disabilities. Further, some disabilities restrict the amount of time that a student is able to be present in required traditional classroom setting. This is certainly a reality for students whose disability limit their level of mobility and impede their ability to attend classes scheduled in sequence but are offered in opposing campus location. Temporal barriers also include the difficulties that some students face in travelling to and from campus, thus limiting the number of courses that they can attend because they cannot travel to campus every day of the week. For these students, it is an accommodation requirement that they take a limited course load.

**Concern Eight: Failure to diagnose non-visible disabilities in the earlier years of post-secondary education can result in lower rates of student success for students with disabilities.**

Diagnosis of non-visible disabilities is crucial in ensuring the success of students at post-secondary institutions. Some, but not many, post-secondary intuitions properly train their staff on key signs to look for when identifying at-risk students, or students with non visible disabilities, and the procedures on how to help these student access the support services they need. Brock University has an at-risk student committee that every year trains new faculty and staff on the key physical and behavioural signs of at-risk students, and they instruct their new faculty on staff on how to approach these students, and encourage them to seek help. Faculty and staff are also trained on the process of registering an at-risk student with the committee and the committee protocol. The committee is responsible for reaching out to the student to provide the necessary help, or point them in the direction of the proper support services. At Brock University the program has had great success and helped many students to achieve success in post-secondary education.

Many post-secondary institution in Ontario do not have programs or committees like this that aid in the recognition and support for student who have no prior diagnosis. Students that go unidentified or undiagnosed with non-visible disabilities can have a lower success rate with post-secondary education.

**Concern Nine: There are affordability and accessibility barriers to preliminary testing that can often prevent proper diagnosis of learning disabilities.**

Student s with disabilities are required to provide specific documentation outlining the type, severity and accommodations need for their individual disability. The necessary documentation required varies from institution to institution, and from disability to disability, meaning that an individual student can have to pay anywhere from \$150 to well over \$2000 out of their pocket. This is not only a concern when applying to post-secondary institutions, most also demands that every 2 or 3 years, the documentation needs to be updated. This financial responsibility placed on students with disability can discourage someone from accessing post-secondary education, or from the completion of their degree.

Students with disabilities also must overcome other accessibility barriers in order to receive a proper diagnosis of a learning disability. With the current onus of providing and pursuing documentation to demonstrate the existence of a disability resting on the shoulders of the individual students, it is crucial that individual students do not feel overly burdened by this expectation. Yet in the pursuit of providing the required documents, students with disabilities currently face barriers that include but are not limited to: geographical, psychological, temporal, technological, and awareness. If we are going to continue to expect individual students to be responsible for the attainment of documents that diagnose disabilities then it is critical that these barriers be removed.

**Concern Ten: The Enhanced Services Fund does not account for the changing costs of all salaries, and does not provide funding for staff members that carry out assessments and provide support.**

The ESF is designed to fund learning strategists and assistive technologists but does not provide funding for the needed staff that carry out assessments, intervention, training and coaching. Although the main goal of the ESF is to provide funds for strategists and technologists, it does not account for regional differences or inflationary increases in salaries, thus reducing the benefit from the fund every year.

**Concern Eleven: Prospective students with disabilities are unaware of support systems and financial aid options available at post-secondary institutions.**

Information for students with disabilities is currently not readily available. High school guidance counselors and University Requirement offices are the primary resource for information for student when applying to post-secondary education. The students who are forgotten in these programs are the students who are not coming directly from high school. People with disabilities who are not recent graduates of high-school programs have no access to information on how to apply to university, what financial supports are available, or which institutions may be best for them. The Ontario Disability Support Program does a great job providing financial and employment support for people with disabilities, but currently does not have support for people with disabilities wanting to access postsecondary education.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation One: Through multi-year agreements and enforcement of the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (2005) standards the provincial government must ensure that all barriers to students with disabilities are eliminated.**

Post-secondary institutions are renowned and celebrated for particular strengths and foci. However, one variable where there should not be disparity amongst post-secondary institutions lies within the services offered for students with disabilities. To this end, standards should be established by the province that creates a baseline of quality service for students with disabilities. Writing these standards into multi-year agreements will ensure the province is holding institutions accountable for making improvements, and will allow stakeholders and the public to hold the government accountable for funding them.

The Ontarians with Disability Act (ODA) provides general guidelines and recommendations which enable and promote practices at post-secondary institutions that are both accessible and inclusive. However, it is essential that a process be established to develop and ensure the implementation of said practices to fully realize the goals of the ODA. This should include clear paths of recourse for those post-secondary institutions that do not comply. Ultimately, legislation must be upheld and institutions be made accountable with effective, fair and timely enforcement.

**Recommendation Two: The Provincial government must support the development of transitional programs that foster the highest level of academic achievement and independent living.**

The philosophy of providing access and opportunity should be based on the premise that all students be provided with the strategies and tools necessary to empower and foster the highest level of independence possible. Within larger cities and communities transitional programs are provided by independent organization. The provincial government needs to ensure that these programs are properly funded, and that the funding made available can be used for the physical expansion and geographical expansion of these programs.

Within our post-secondary institutions it is important that the provincial government identify independent living guidance as a services provided by access offices. It is extremely important that within the first couple of months the post-secondary institutions focus on making the quality of education, but most importantly, the quality of life the best it can be for students with disabilities. Providing support centers for students with disabilities with the proper funding and support to ensure that these access offices are able to help student through transition and towards independence is a key concept in retention of students with disabilities.

**Recommendation Three: The Bursary for Students with Disabilities must be separated from Ontario Students Assistance Program and have its own independent assessment criteria.**

A student's OSAP eligibility should not affect their eligibility for the BSWD. The funding for the BSWD should be granted based on the individual students' disabilities, not tied to the requirement for OSAP. The requirement alone should not be a basis for the bursary as in many cases, disability service providers have confirmed students in financial need and in need of disability related services that have not qualified for OSAP.<sup>27</sup> The Disability service providers at each institution should liaise with Financial Aid Offices to develop an appropriate financial needs test that can be tailored to the disability needs test. There should be a form of communication with the Canada Student Grant to ensure consistency from provincial and federal forms of assistance.

**Recommendation Four: The Provincial government must increase funding to the Accessibility Fund and change the distribution formula to place a greater weight on the number of registered students with disabilities at each institution.**

OUSA believes that base funding should still continue to be distributed to the universities based on the numbers of full-time enrollment, however, there should be a greater proportion of funds distributed to institutions based on actual numbers of registered students with disabilities. As recommended by the Rae Report, "Ontario: A Leader in Learning," this method would allow for institutions to adequately meet the needs of currently enrolled students with disabilities, while still having the capacity to plan and prepare for future students.<sup>28</sup>

**Recommendation Five: The Provincial government must create a program to provide funding to post-secondary institutions to support expediency for compliance to the new Accessibility for Ontarians Disability Act (2005) standards.**

With the release of the new standards within the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (2005), Post-secondary Institutions are expected to self-fund renovations and major alteration to their campuses without any financial support from the Provincial government. The new standards are being released in 5 components; customer service, transportation, built environment, information and communication, and employment. Currently the Customer Services component is the only one which has been passed into law. After the approval of the other 4 components, post-secondary institutions will be required, along with all public sectors, to be compliant by 2025.

<sup>27</sup> CCDI submission to the Postsecondary Review – November 15, 2004

<sup>28</sup> Rae Review, February 2005; accessed online at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/postsec.pdf>.

The Provincial Government is currently expecting each individual institution to self fund the renovations and alterations to their campuses. The financial implications of implementing all of these changes on individual campuses will be extremely demanding to the current institution budgets. Currently, the Accessibility Fund envelope is accessed by post-secondary institutions to help recover the cost of counseling, consulting and diagnostic services, technological support, including specially adapted computers and software, tutors, sign-language interpreters, note takers and readers,<sup>29</sup> and this fund also includes the “Enhanced Services Fund” which provides funds for learning strategists, assistive technologists and related technologies. However, within the fund there is no consideration for built environment alterations, and customer service items such as alternative document formats.

Within the Accessibility Fund, the government should invest in creating a new program that post-secondary institutions can access to help with the expediency of compliance with the new AODA standards. This would ensure that compliance of the new standards does not impose on the current maintenance budgets and other financial considerations on individual campuses.

**Recommendation Six: The provincial government must require individual institutions to assess full time status for students with disabilities on an individual basis, and that status must be accepted when applying for scholarships, bursaries, and grants at all levels.**

For many disabled students, ‘full-time’ means a ‘part-time’ course load. Thus, eligibility requirements must take into account the challenges facing individuals living with disabilities, and not disqualify a student with a disability because they do not fit into an otherwise defined category. Other criteria such as merit, personal financial need, course specialization, or recognition of special contributions to academic or extracurricular life should be considered.

While the province does not have the ability to regulate most private scholarships and awards, they do have the ability to require that future scholarships, bursaries and awards which are established using provincial money through matching programs such as the Ontario Student Opportunities Trust Fund (OSOTF) or the Ontario Trusts for Student Support (OTSS) all for an alternative full-time status for students with disabilities. The province also has the ability to project significant moral suasion on universities and colleges to make changes to other awards not established with support from provincial coffers.

**Recommendation Seven: The Enhanced Services Fund should be increased to cover the cost of additional staff members who carry out assessments and provide support.**

The Enhanced Services Fund was set up to cover the staffing costs for learning strategists and assistive technologists, and does not cover the cost of other equally essential staff who carry out assessments, intervention, training, and coaching. Therefore, OUSA believes additional funds should be allocated within this envelope to cover the cost of these necessary staff to ensure institutions do not suffer undue financial hardship.

**Recommendation Eight: The Bursary for Students with Disabilities must be expanded to cover those costs of disability assessments that are currently unmet.**

The Federal government has identified the need to help cover the cost of assessments. In 2000 the Federal Government created the Canada Study Grant for Students with Disabilities, which included an eligible education-related expense. This program covers 75% of the cost of diagnostic assessment for learning disabilities up to a maximum of \$1200 per year<sup>30</sup>. The concern with this program is that it does not cover the full cost of individual assessments required by institutions. Increasing the amount of funding a student can access within BSWD program will allow the costs of assessments to be fully covered.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.neds.ca/en/norc/faq/index.php?ID=5>

The provincial government needs to partner with the federal government to provide students with disability with bursaries to fully cover the cost of disability assessments. With the federal government covering 75% of the costs, the provincial government needs to provide the means to cover the remainder 25%. The provincial government must allow students to access the Bursary for Students' with Disability fund to cover the remainder of the costs.

**Recommendation Nine: The provincial government should provide information about post-secondary education and support systems available at individual institutions to all Ontarians on the Ontario Disability Support Program.**

The current Ontario Disability Support Program provides eligible people with disabilities financial aid and help finding a job for those who can work<sup>31</sup>. This program is designed to help people with disabilities gain independence, and increase their quality of life.

There is an increased demand for people with disabilities to attend post-secondary institutions. A report published by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities indicated the number of university students with disabilities accessing support services has increased from 1.12 percent to 3.8 percent of the university population<sup>32</sup>. This indicates that more and more students with disabilities are successfully accessing post-secondary education.

Within the Ontario Disability Support Program the provincial government should create a third component "Education support." This program would work as an outreach program for people with disabilities in Ontario. As Ontario moves into a "knowledge economy" it is important that all people with disabilities have the opportunity to pursue high quality employment. With the ever increasing importance of a post-secondary education in attaining meaningful employment, the Ontario government through the ODSP has a responsibility to provide information and assistance for accessing post-secondary education. Therefore, an "Education support program" would regularly provide information to all Ontarians on ODSP and could be further accessed by those individuals who are interested in pursuing a post-secondary education. The creation of this program will help by providing Ontarians with disabilities the necessary information for accessing and succeeding in post secondary education.

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<sup>31</sup> "Ontario disability support program" accessed online at <http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/en/mcass/programs/social/odsp/index.aspx>

<sup>32</sup> Lisa Rae "University Students and Mental health" *Public Policy and Governance Review Vol. 1 No. 1 Fall 2009*

## Students with Disabilities Policy Statement

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**WHEREAS** all willing, and qualified students must be guaranteed access to a post-secondary education.

**WHEREAS** all students with disabilities must be assessed individually to determine proper accommodation and all necessary resources must be provided to fulfill their accommodation requirements.

**WHEREAS** students with disabilities must not be burdened with the additional costs related to accessing and participating in post-secondary education due to their disability.

**WHEREAS** faculty and staff at post-secondary institutions must be aware of and respect the rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and how to properly accommodate them.

**WHEREAS** student support services are a fundamental part of fostering student success.

**WHEREAS** all students should be made aware of and have access to preliminary testing available at universities.

**WHEREAS** adequate information and support must be easily accessible and well publicized to prospective students with disabilities throughout the application process.

**WHEREAS** students with disabilities face systemic disadvantages in accessing post-secondary education.

**WHEREAS** students with disabilities do not always receive proper accommodation due to insufficient resources available.

**WHEREAS** students with disabilities face greater financial burden in accessing and succeed in the post-secondary education system.

**WHEREAS** not all students with disabilities are able to access the Bursary for Students with Disabilities program because of its continued linkage with Ontario Student Assistance Program.

**WHEREAS** the Accessibility Fund is inappropriately distributed and is not meeting the needs of students with disabilities in Ontario's post-secondary education system.

**WHEREAS** current full-time status requirements for students with disabilities can be a barrier to accessing scholarships, bursaries, and student services that are not available to part-time students.

**WHEREAS** students with disabilities may face barriers that hinder course and program selection due to temporal and geographical inaccessibility.

**WHEREAS** failure to diagnose non-visible disabilities in the earlier years of post-secondary education can result in lower rates of student success for students with disabilities.

**WHEREAS** there are affordability and accessibility barriers to preliminary testing that can often prevent proper diagnosis of learning disabilities.

**WHEREAS** the Enhanced Services Fund does not account for the changing costs of all salaries, and does not provide funding for staff members that carry out assessments and provide support.

**WHEREAS** prospective students with disabilities are unaware of support systems and financial aid options available at post-secondary institutions.

**BIRT** through multi-year agreements and enforcement of the new Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act (2005) standards the provincial government must ensure that all barriers to students with disabilities are eliminated.

**BIFRT** the Provincial government must support the development of transitional programs that foster the highest level of academic achievement and independent living.

**BIFRT** the Bursary for Students with Disabilities must be separated from Ontario Students Assistance Program and have its own independent assessment criteria.

**BIFRT** the Provincial government must increase funding to the Accessibility Fund and change the distribution formula to place a greater weight on the number of registered students with disabilities at each institution.

**BIFRT** the Provincial government must create a program to provide funding to post-secondary institutions to support expediency for compliance to the new Accessibility for Ontarians Disability Act (2005) standards.

**BIFRT** the provincial government must require individual institutions to assess full time status for students with disabilities on an individual basis, and that status must be accepted when applying for scholarships, bursaries, and grants at all levels.

**BIFRT** the Enhanced Services Fund should be increased to cover the cost of additional staff members who carry out assessments and provide support.

**BIFRT** the Bursary for Students with Disabilities must be expanded to cover those costs of disability assessments that are currently unmet.

**BIFRT** the provincial government should provide information about post-secondary education and support systems available at individual institutions to all Ontarians on the Ontario Disability Support Program.