



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER June 2015

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Special Needs Update

Coordinated Services

The June 15th deadline is fast approaching and almost all communities are ready to submit their plan for Coordinated Services. Over the last few months community planning committees have been working hard to develop a plan and incorporate feedback from families, youth and other stakeholders. OAFCCD thanks all of the members that took time to complete on-line surveys or attend focus groups.

At this point in the process it is hard to get much information about the plans for Coordinated Services. This is a frustrating for stakeholders not at the planning table and for OAFCCD. It is to be hoped that the lack of communication about the plans is a timing issues and that there will be more communication when the plans are completed.

The Ministries have also been clear that all resources in the current system are to be maintained through the planning process. They have also indicated that the new funding available to implement the plans is very limited, although there is an opportunity to realign existing resources.

Implementation for the community coordinated services is to begin later this year, with decisions about each plan to be made over the summer. OAFCCD is recommending that the government mesh the community plans into a provincial system that provides consistent services to children and their families.

OAFCCD is advocating that:

- Regions should be combined or required to work collaboratively to ensure consistent service levels across the province and to ensure families, wherever they are in the province, can access services easily.

- The new single points of access should be denoted by similar consistent names and logos using common language and terminology.
- Transition protocols between regions should be developed as part of the planning process to ensure that portability of service plans and that services are continuous for children with special needs when their families move around the province.
- Conflict resolution mechanisms should be developed at the community and provincial level. This should include an appeal process for families who are dissatisfied with decisions about services for their child.
- Service Planning Coordinators should foster parent capacity and empower families. They should be able to provide differentiated responses related to the unique needs and capacity of each family.
- Service Planning Coordinators should be responsive to social and cultural differences.
- Caseloads should be manageable recognizing that many families will need support over a twenty year period. As far as possible continuity of staff should be encouraged as effective support is based on relationships and trust.

Integrated Rehabilitation Services

The planning process for the integration of rehabilitation services, including speech and language services, is on-going. Some regions have consulted with families and other stakeholders on coordinated services and integrated rehabilitation services at the same time. Others are just starting, or are continuing, to engage families regarding rehabilitation services.

The deadline for Integrated Rehabilitation plans is October 31st, 2015 and work will continue over the summer months.

Special Needs Strategy – Integrated Rehabilitation

OAFCCD is especially interested in the planning for integration of rehabilitation services. OAFCCD has long advocated for an effective speech and language delivery service is based on the following principles.

- **Speech and Language Services should be publicly funded**, available in every community in a timely manner, regardless of diagnosis, or family circumstances.
- **Services should be equitably distributed** with mandatory provision and funding, and local coordination of services which recognizes and responds to unique community characteristics.
- **Provincial standards** should be in place to ensure on-going identification of children at risk for communication disorders.
- **Healthy development** of speech, language and hearing should be promoted.
- **Early and on-going intervention** should be provided.
- Services should be delivered to children in an **environment that is as familiar** and natural as possible, and the travel distance should be kept to a minimum.
- Speech and language programming should be **integrated into the child's learning** environment as much as possible.
- **A full range of speech and language services** should be available using a variety of delivery models to best meet the needs of the child.
- **Specialized speech and language services** should be available for the children that require them (i.e. augmentative communication, audiology).
- **Parents should be empowered** through training, support and recognition of their role. Parents are vital partners in the delivery of speech and language services.
- **Services should continuously support** the child and significant others (teachers, educational assistants, parents, caregivers, etc.) to allow the child to meet the changing demands as she/he progresses toward adulthood.
- **The service system should be seamless** with smooth transitions between service providers.

OAFCCD is optimistic that many of these principals will be included in the community plans

for integrated services.

One of the challenges of the planning process will be the hard decisions on how to redesign the system to integrate services using existing resources. This may include moving services from current providers to different providers.

The Ministry guidelines have already addressed one of the challenges of the current system, the separation of speech services from language services. This is a major step in the development of integrated services and should reduce duplication and reduce gaps in services.

Everyone agrees that the needs of children and youth should be considered holistically and the separation of speech and language did not make sense. However, as the proverb says “the devil is in the details” and how each planning committee integrates delivery of speech and language services may vary greatly.

OAFCCD has developed a Position Statement on the Special Needs Strategy and key messages include:

- Speech and Language Pathology services are more than rehabilitation services. In the context of child development they are habilitation services, providing prevention and intervention services to help children develop skills. They support the development of speech and language skills and are critical to the development of literacy, numeracy and academic skills at school.
- Speech and language services should be consistent across the province with all school boards having the capacity to meet the needs of students who are at risk, or who have a speech or language impairment.
- The development of language skills, and the impact of language impairment, is not well understood or recognized. Language constitutes a principal means of organizing behaviour and is central to the normal acquisition of many cognitive and academic skills, particularly literacy. Language provides the main method of establishing and maintaining social relationships.
- Development of language skills is fundamental for all children and the services system should focus on the skill development of all children, with additional services available to children who are at risk, or who have language impairments.