

## Jones pleased with government's change in autism services

The Provincial government has announced it will be providing more support for children and youth with autism, including an accelerated implementation of the new Ontario Autism Program.

That is something Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones has been calling for weeks.

The new program will provide all children, regardless of age, with more flexible services at a level of intensity that meets each child's individual needs, significantly reduce wait times for service, and increase the number of treatment spaces available to serve more children and accommodate the rising prevalence in autism diagnoses, according to a statement issued by the Province Tuesday morning.

"We know that parents want the best for their children," Children and Youth Services Minister Michael Coteau remarked. "I've heard from parents and advocates alike that we needed to do better for their kids. While the fundamental principles of the new Ontario Autism Program remain intact, I am pleased to announce today a smoother and faster transition to the new program for kids with autism in Ontario. I am confident that once fully implemented, the new Ontario Autism Program will deliver the critical services that kids need, when they need them, regardless of their age."

Jones, Progressive Conservative critic for children and youth services, was quick to react.

"Today's announcement signals the Minister has listened to the concerns raised by thousands of parents, experts, organizations, municipalities and both opposition parties regarding the government's original decision to remove children over the age of five from receiving Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapy," she said in a statement issued by her office.

"Since the March 29 announcement, the Ontario PC Caucus and I have been working directly with families impacted by the government's decision and service providers on how to address this issue," she added. "We continuously called on the government to reverse their decision and shared countless stories from families and experts that spoke of the benefits of IBI therapy for children over the age of five."

"With today's announcement, no longer will children over the age of five be removed from receiving this life-changing therapy," Jones observed. "I want to thank the Minister for making these important changes."

Jones also said she and her colleagues look forward to reviewing the details of the government's plan, and will continue to advocate for impacted families.