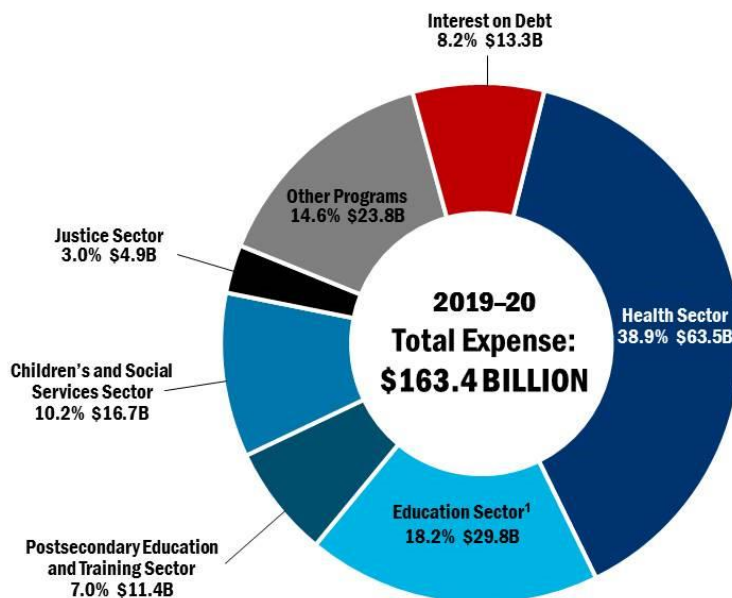


ONTARIO BUDGET 2019

On April 11, 2019 Ontario's Conservative Government introduced its first provincial budget, [Protecting What Matters Most](#). Ontario's provincial budget totals \$163.4 billion for 2019 – 20. The sheer magnitude of the health sector budget within the overall budget reminds occupational therapists that they are part of the province's largest industry. Health spending in 2019 – 20 will consume 38.9% of the budget at \$63.5 billion.

Chart 3.2
COMPOSITION OF TOTAL EXPENSE, 2019-20



¹ Excludes Teachers' Pension Plan. Teachers' Pension Plan expense is included in Other Programs.

Note: Numbers may not add due to rounding.

The following pages reflect components of the budget we believe to be of interest to Ontario occupational therapists. The diversity of the profession's practice is reflected in diverse sections of the budget and ministries through which issues are funded. Highlights alone are shared. More detail and

the nuance of the government's intent can be accessed in a more thorough read of the [budget document](#).

OSOT members are encouraged to consider the challenges or opportunities that this budget presents to access to occupational therapy services. OSOT's Strategic Advocacy Team and Practice Sector Teams will be reviewing the budget and will welcome member thoughts and reactions. Forward your comments to osot@osot.on.ca.

The following budget topics are highlighted in this document:

Accessibility	Assistive Devices Program
Autism Services	Auto Insurance
Children's Drug Benefit	Children with Special Needs
Digital Strategy	Emergency Services
Health Professional Scope of Practice	Health System Transformation
Home and Community Care	Hospitals
Housing and Homelessness	Long-Term Care
Mental Health	Post-Secondary Tuition
Public Health	Seniors
Social Assistance	

Accessibility

- Government will partner with the Rick Hansen Foundation to launch the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification™ program in select communities across the province. With a \$1.3 million investment over two years, this program will prepare accessibility assessments of businesses and public buildings and, together with property managers and owners, determine ways to remove any identified barriers for people with visible and invisible disabilities.

Assistive Devices Program

- No cutbacks to the Assistive Devices Program funding was announced.
- The government will implement more competitive pricing for home oxygen rates that would result in a reduction of about 17 per cent in price, with savings going to eligible clients who pay a 25 per cent co-payment. Individuals on social assistance would continue to receive benefits at no cost.

Autism Services

- The Budget speaks to the [previously announced government plan](#) to eliminate the waitlist for children and youth on the autism spectrum by introducing Childhood Budgets that parents will administer to access services for their child. This will include the enhanced announced reforms to ASD services and supports which include access to occupational therapy services.

- A commitment to community consultations that include diverse professional voices, and those of adults with lived experience to address additional enhancements that will be framed in a needs-based approach.
- There is no specific mention of Special Education supports for student but reference to broad public consultation regarding education in Ontario schools.

Auto Insurance

- Government commits to work with the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) to
 - overhaul the licensing system for health service providers to reduce regulatory burden and fraud, including lowering the treatment fees charged by providers;
 - Reform the flawed medical assessment process (IME) to bring credibility and accountability to the assessments that injured claimants must undergo after an accident.
 - Support modernization and innovation in the sector including;
 - Support innovative business models, pricing structures and technologies, such as pay-as-you-go insurance;
 - Reducing the regulatory burden by improving the way auto insurance rates are regulated;
 - Reviewing guidelines, bulletins and forms to remove the burden and simplify processes;
 - Eliminating red tape by repealing outdated and ineffective legislation and simplifying regulations such as the Statutory Accident Benefits Schedule; and
 - Working with the Civil Rules Committee to increase the monetary limit for simplified procedures, and reduce the costly and time-consuming use of civil juries for simplified procedure trials.
- The government will also work with the Law Society of Ontario to make contingency fee agreements more transparent for injured claimants who choose to hire a lawyer. As part of this work, the Province will evaluate the effectiveness of the current contingency fee arrangements to ensure consumers are being fully protected.
- Budget introduces the government's *Putting Drivers First* blueprint, a multi-year strategy that will focus on;
 - combatting fraud through work with FSRA and the newly established Serious Fraud Office to develop a fraud reduction strategy and modernize the systems that improve the delivery of health care benefits, including:
 - Strong anti-fraud measures, such as enhanced data analytics to detect fraud, and new rules on unfair or deceptive acts or practices
 - A modern online claims process that lets consumers see how their auto accident benefits are being used, to make the claims process more convenient and help detect and discourage fraud.

- A commitment to take early action to make the consumer insurance experience easier and more convenient introducing in the short term;
 - Facilitating electronic communications and e-commerce making it fast and simple to do business with insurance companies;
 - Bringing the convenience of electronic proof of auto insurance to Ontario drivers;
 - Enabling innovation and new business models to give drivers more options, such as car subscription services that include insurance
 - Making it easier for insurance companies to offer more discounts and options to consumers to make their insurance policy more affordable. Eg. Drivers have choice to lower their premiums by allowing insurers to consider their credit history or by agreeing to use preferred providers of auto repair or health care services.
 - Simplifying forms, policies and other related documents so that drivers better understand coverage & can make informed decisions about what they're buying.
 - The Driver Care Plan will ensure that injured claimants receive quick access to treatment and care. The Plan will include:
- Introduces a new *Driver Care* Plan that will ensure that injured claimant receive quick access to treatment and care. This plan will include:
 - A Driver Care Card, which will streamline access to care by providing important information that will make the claim process easier to navigate
 - A “Care, Not Cash” default clause to ensure that a driver’s auto insurance coverage will pay for treatment instead of costly legal fees while giving the driver the option to be eligible to receive cash settlements if they so choose;
 - An improved early treatment system for common injuries, including mental health treatment (no reported change to the \$3500 minor injury benefit)
 - A return to the default benefit limit of \$2 million for those who are catastrophically injured in an accident, after it was previously reduced to \$1 million in 2016.

Children’s Drug Benefit Program

- Effective April 1, 2019, Ontario’s Drug Benefit Program will be limited to children and youth under the age of 25 *who are not covered by private plans*. These children will continue to receive coverage for eligible prescription medications from the government; children and youth who are covered by private insurance will bill those plans. Part of a sustainability plan.

Children with Special Needs

- Investment in construction of Grandview Children’s Centre (Ajax) and Children’s Treatment Centre at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (Ottawa) to support children with developmental disabilities, reducing wait times for service, address capacity issues and optimize program efficiencies through integration of rehabilitation services.

Digital Strategy

- Commitment to move forward on a digital strategy that will bring government into 21st century, adopting a “digital first” approach
- Commitments across sectors to modernize and introduce digital technology

Emergency Services

- To support the critical work of emergency health first responders, the government is continuing to invest in supports for mental health and in reducing the time it takes to deliver patients to busy emergency departments.
- Government is exploring new models of care and delivery for emergency health services to improve care for patients and reduce duplication.
- Select 911 medical emergency patients who are transported to emergency departments may be more appropriately treated in other health care settings. The government will be exploring how to support better care for patients in places other than the emergency department and ensure patient safety. The government will also look at how to ensure more of its investment in emergency health services is going towards direct services for patients.

Health Professionals Scopes of Practice

- Announced that pharmacists, nurse practitioners, dental specialists and optometrists would have expansion of professional scope of practice to enable them to more effectively contribute to system efficiencies.

Health System Transformation

- Government is moving forward with changes to health care delivery in Ontario with a goal to make the system easier to navigate and shifting health care dollars from the bureaucracy to front-line care.
- Budget affirms commitments to system reform that will move towards an integrated health care delivery model through the development of Ontario Health Teams which will improve transitions in care and reduce waitlists for services.
- Ontario Health Teams will organize care delivery according to the needs of their local communities, thereby allowing groups of health care providers, such as hospitals, physicians, mental health professionals, and home and community care providers, to coordinate the care requirements in their area as a single team of providers. Early adopters will be announced in summer 2019, and provincewide implementation is expected in 2020.
- Government will continue the process of consolidating six existing Provincial health agencies and the costly and Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) into a new, single agency. The new agency, Ontario Health, will strengthen what's working by bringing resources together to assess ideas and successes that can be used to improve other programs and care for patients.
- Implement a digital first for health strategy that will increase the use of virtual care and give the people of Ontario digital tools to access their own personal health information
- Create a centralized procurement system to better manage the purchasing of products and devices for hospitals, home and community care, and long-term care. Through an integrated health sector supply chain that builds on current, successful models, the inconsistent fragmented system will be transformed into a coordinated one, aligned under the oversight of a

single authority — Ontario Health.

- The government is proposing amendments to the *Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act, 1997*(PSLRTA) If passed, the legislation would provide labour relations certainty to workers and employers during a time of transformation. The amendments will assist the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in providing efficient delivery of health services and a system that facilitates effective, quality care for the people of Ontario

Home and Community Care

- Investment of \$267 million in additional funding for home and community care. This will include investments focused on increasing front-line care delivery, such as personal support services, nursing, therapy and other professional services at home and in the community. Investments will also provide community supports such as meals and transportation, assisted living services in supportive housing, services for people with an acquired brain injury and services for Indigenous peoples and Francophones.
- Increasing access to support in the community is expected to enable more people to get care when and where they need it
- As the population grows and ages, expanded home and community care is also expected to reduce waitlists for long-term care and decrease pressures on hospitals, thereby alleviating hallway health care.

Hospitals

- Investment of an additional \$384 million in the hospital sector as part of the efforts to end hallway health care by maintaining critical hospital capacity, increasing access to highly specialized and innovative treatments, and supporting volume growth.

Housing and Homelessness

- The Province's current supportive housing system is difficult for people to navigate and does not effectively address the unique needs of individuals. To improve the flexibility of the system and the outcomes for people, the government will undertake a comprehensive review to identify opportunities to streamline and improve coordination of the Province's supportive housing programs.

Long-Term Care

- Commitment to create 15,000 new long-term care beds over the next five years will be in addition to the existing 78,500 beds in the system.
- Commitment to upgrade an additional 15,000 older long-term care beds to modern design standards, which will allow the long-term care sector to provide more appropriate care to those with complex health conditions.
- These measures represent a total investment of approximately \$1.75 billion in additional funding over five years.

Mental Health

- Commitment of \$3.8 billion for mental health, addictions and housing supports over 10 years to address these issues, beginning with building a mental health and addictions system focused on core services embedded in a stepped-care model, and a robust data and measurement framework.
- Investments of \$174 million in 2019–20 will support community mental health and addictions services, mental health and justice services, supportive housing, and acute mental health inpatient beds. Services will also target priority populations, such as Indigenous peoples and Francophones.
- Building a centre of excellence in mental health and addictions services such as the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre’s Hurvitz Brain Sciences Centre which will focus on treatment and innovation in caring for the full range of brain disorders, including mental illness and addictions, as well as dementia and neurodegenerative disorders, in an environment that allows for more effective care delivery for patients. Projects such as this one are targeted to provide important mental health and addictions services with a focus on ambulatory care and community outreach, enabling care providers to deliver services to patients across the province.
- The government continues to support emergency health first responders suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Under the *Supporting Ontario’s First Responders Act*, a PTSD diagnosis for certain workers is now presumed to be work-related — they no longer need to prove it. This includes first responders, including police officers and correctional officers, youth service workers, emergency dispatchers and others, and gives these workers faster access to Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) benefits, resources and timely treatment.

Post-Secondary Tuition

- Making postsecondary education more affordable is part of the government’s plan to ensure that people have the training and skills they need to get good paying jobs.
- Government is lowering tuition rates by 10 per cent starting in the 2019–20 school year for every funding eligible student enrolled in a publicly funded college or university in the province. The new tuition framework will also freeze tuition fees for the 2020–21 school year.
- Starting in the 2019 – 20 school year, Government will ensure 82% of Student Grants will go to students with a family income of less than \$50,000 up from 76%
- Government is introducing legislation to continue to support students with loans by paying interest on their loans while they are in school and making sure that the interest, once it starts accruing for students upon completion of study, is at an affordable rate.

Public Health

- Commitment to reform structure of public health and establish 10 regional public health entities and 10 new regional boards of health with one common governance model by 2020–21
- Modernize Ontario’s public health laboratory system by developing a regional strategy to create greater efficiencies across the system and reduce the number of laboratories
- Protect what matters most by ensuring public health agencies focus their efforts on providing better, more efficient front-line care by removing back-office inefficiencies through digitizing and streamlining processes

Seniors

- Budget commits Ontario’s vision is to help seniors remain independent, healthy, active, safe and socially connected.
- Commitment to introduce a new dental program for low-income Ontario seniors with an annual investment of approximately \$90 million when fully implemented. By late summer 2019, single seniors age 65 and older with incomes of \$19,300 or less (or senior couples with combined incomes of less than \$32,300) and without existing dental benefits, will be able to receive dental services in public health units, community health centres and Aboriginal Health Access Centres located throughout the province. By winter 2020, this program will be expanded by investing in new dental services in underserved areas, including through mobile dental buses and an increased number of dental suites in public health units.
- The Province will be developing a new cross-government strategy to improve the lives of seniors and provide the supports and resources to help them live independently, ensure their safety and security, connect them to the community and help them achieve greater financial security and social connections.

Social Assistance

- Government is reforming social assistance — to restore dignity, reduce administrative red tape, and empower social assistance recipients to enter and remain in the labour market.
- While this work is underway, Ontario Works and ODSP rates were increased by 1.5 per cent in fall 2018.
- Government will increase the amount of earnings that recipients can have before their benefits are reduced. This will provide more support as recipients enter the workforce, and improve the incomes of those who are currently working. Ontario Works recipients will be able to keep up to \$300 in earnings per month, an increase from \$200 per month without it impacting their social assistance benefits. ODSP recipients will experience greater flexibility through an annual exemption of \$6,000 in earnings per year instead of the current \$200 per month. Benefits will be reduced by 75 cents for each dollar earned above these amounts to encourage recipients to increase their labour force participation and achieve greater financial independence.