



# **O.D.S.P. ACTION COALITION**

C/O PARKDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES, 1266 Queen St W., Toronto, ON, M6K 1L3

## **MPP LOBBY KIT**

**APRIL 2012**



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**NOTE:** This lobby kit is available in both word and PDF and can be downloaded in full or by section at: <http://sareview.ca/isac-resources/mpp-lobby-kit/> . Additional documents that provide more background on the issues are also available at the link above.



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## Why Lobby

Lobbying means writing letters, meeting or talking to politicians about laws or programs like ODSP. We do it in order to get things changed for the better. Lobbying and meeting with government representatives is always an important thing to do: it is our democratic right, and is crucial if we want to have a say in the decisions that our government makes. However, it is especially important to lobby the Ontario government now around the issues of ODSP and social assistance.

- The government asked two people, Francis Lankin and Munir Sheikh, to review our social assistance programs, Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program, and let the government know how these programs should be changed. We want these changes to be positive for people on OW and ODSP. We need to talk to politicians about this review to make sure that proposed changes don't just cut costs and reduce spending, at the expense of people on OW and ODSP.
- The Ontario government says that they owe too much money, so they have to either stop spending or cut back on what they spend. We fear that this means that people on social assistance will not see any increase in their incomes and that other positive changes won't happen, since the government does not want to spend money right now.
- In 2012 Budget, the government proposed to freeze OW and ODSP for one year. After negotiations with one of the opposition parties, the Budget will include a 1% increase to OW and ODSP. That's the same increase as the last two years – a measly 1% per year, which does not even keep up with the rising costs of living (inflation). People on social assistance are getting poorer. We need to pressure the government to improve the lives of people on social assistance. This includes raising the rates to a livable income. The government claims that it needs to make cut-backs and sacrifices, but these should not be made on the backs of the poorest among us.

### Who in the Government should you lobby?

Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) are our representatives in the Ontario government. They can be part of the Liberal party, which is the party that currently forms the government, the New Democratic Party (NDP), or the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party. MPPs are the ones who present ideas and changes and, in the end, vote on many of the laws that people in our province are affected by. They are the people who will decide what social assistance (including ODSP) will look like after the social assistance review is complete.



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## How to Use This Lobby Kit

This kit includes tips and templates to help you with your advocacy efforts. Specifically, it includes:

1. **ODSP Action Coalition's Key Messages:** This document talks about our most important issues: social assistance rates and the Social Assistance Review. *This key messages document is to be sent when you send a letter requesting a meeting with your MPP, so they have a chance to look at it before you meet.* You will talk about these key messages at the meeting.
2. **Questions for MPPs:** Depending on how much time you have for your meeting, you may have to choose which questions to ask. Decide beforehand what you would like to focus on and try to get an answer, or better yet a promise, from your MPP.
3. **Messages and story worksheet** can help you prepare for the meeting with your MPP.
4. **MPP letter template** which you can use to contact your MPP and set up a meeting.
5. **Lobby Tip-Sheet** with helpful suggestions on how to contact your MPP and set up a meeting.
6. **Follow-up MPP letter template** to be sent to your MPP after your meeting.
7. **MPP report back form:** Fill this out after your meeting with the MPP. This will help the ODSP Action Coalition keep track of how the meeting went and what promises individual MPPs made across the province. You can mail/email this form or you can call Naomi Berlyne at 416-516-1422 ext. 250 and let her know how the meeting went over the phone.



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## Key Messages

### 1. ENSURE ADEQUACY

All we seem to hear about these days is that the economy is very bad and government must make “tough choices” to cut spending. But people on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) have been suffering from not having enough money for many years.

In Ontario’s latest budget, the government proposed to “freeze” social assistance rates. After negotiation with one of the opposition parties, the budget will include a 1% increase to OW and ODSP rates, starting in fall 2012. Because the cost of food, rent and other necessary items goes up each year (called inflation), this means that **people will be able to buy less of the things they need**. In fact, because the cost of basic needs goes up every year, people on social assistance have less money to spend on the things they need than they did in 1996. The government has also proposed other cuts and changes which add up to a loss of over \$100 million for social assistance recipients in housing and other assistance.

The problem is that these cuts won’t save the government any money. **Poverty is expensive**. And the hard times that people in Ontario are facing would be better if government invested in good jobs for all and income security for people with the lowest incomes. Rather than push people further into poverty, the government should:

**Immediately index OW and ODSP rates to inflation so people don’t slide deeper into poverty this year.**

**Establish an independent board, which would include people on social assistance, to set rates in future.**

**And raise the rates to reflect average rents, utility costs, food, transportation and other basic needs, including the additional costs of having a disability.**

### 2. MAKE SURE REFORM = LESS POVERTY

The government set up the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance as part of its poverty reduction strategy. But now it seems they are only paying attention to how they can run ODSP and OW with less money - **which won’t mean less poverty**. The government is worried that too many people need ODSP, and the Commission has proposed some ideas that include ending ODSP.



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Ontario Works needs some big changes, and so do employment supports. If OW and ODSP are put together before these things get better, people with disabilities will be worse off. People will have less money for basic needs; health conditions will get worse; and, costs to the health care system will continue to skyrocket.

The changes being proposed are huge, and could lead to crisis in people's lives. **People with disabilities must be meaningfully involved** in this planning and implementation process. The Commission presented possible options, but not enough details.

The Review is part of the government's poverty reduction strategy. It will be a success if the final recommendations will make the lives of people on OW and ODSP better.

**Do not make any changes to ODSP unless people with disabilities are included in planning those changes.**

**Ensure that no one on ODSP will lose money as a result of any restructuring the government undertakes.**

### 3. DON'T PUNISH PEOPLE INTO WORKING

The government is very focused on getting people on social assistance to work. But where are the jobs? And will those jobs accommodate people's disabilities? Will they have benefits? The answer in the current labour market is: No.

If government wants to get people to work, they need to **do a lot better at providing employment supports**: like money for university or college; and, self-employment supports. Government needs to have a workforce strategy for people with disabilities – because there are many barriers that block people with disabilities from working. We need government to enforce laws that protect people's rights at work – and do more than the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) does.

Don't punish people into working: instead, let them keep more of the money they earn, and provide the things everyone needs to look for work and be successful at work (clothes, transportation, etc).

**Support people with better employment supports, don't punish them with workfare.**



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## **Questions for MPPs**

- 1) The final report of the Social Assistance Review will be finished this June. **How does your party intend to respond to the recommendations?**
- 2) A single person on ODSP currently receives a maximum of \$1064 per month. It's not enough to live on. **How will your party improve adequacy for people on OW and ODSP, given the current fiscal climate? What will you do personally? What will you do to bring other MPPs on side?**
- 3) The ODSP Action Coalition believes that people should be allowed to keep at least \$500 in earned income from a job or self employment, which is the same amount that recipients can keep each month as help from family or friends with no deductions from their ODSP cheque. **What is your party's position on whether or not earnings should be clawed back from people with disabilities who work but do not make enough money to leave ODSP? What is your position personally?**
- 4) **What other kinds of concrete support can you provide to assist us in moving our vision forward for improving social assistance so that people with disabilities are truly supported in their communities and in the workforce?**



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## Lobbying – Key Messages and Personal Story

Effective Advocacy has 3 important parts: strong key messages; 1-2 “asks” or solutions; and a personal story. You can use this sheet to help you figure out your key messages, the solution you want; and how it affects your life.

### My Key Messages:

We may have lots of problems that we want to speak about, but our key messages are the *most important things* said in the *simplest way*. To help you come up with *your* key messages:

- Create a short summary of what is important to you
- Decide the most important points you want to make. You can use the Coalition’s messages but choose one or two that you have a personal example of. This makes it easier for the MPP to understand why that point is important to you and how a change will affect your life.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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## My Asks:

This is your solution, or the one thing that you want the MPP to do. Effective advocacy is not just talking about problems. Effective advocacy is about solutions as well.

- Your asks are the 1-3 things that you want to see happen or changed. End your conversation/letter/presentation with your asks.

## Tips:

- Be specific and clear
- Avoid being too broad or general (for example, “I need your support” is way too general)
- Link to your personal story, if possible
- Mention these again at the end of your conversation/letter/presentation

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## My Personal Story:

Your personal story is a real life example of the problems that you are speaking about. Politicians hear facts and figures all the time – what you can provide to them are *real life examples* of how these problems affect you directly.

- Life stories are complex – the personal story you use for advocacy has to be a simple version
- Choose a story that is an examples of how the problems plays out in real life
- Show how this problem affected you
- Choose whether to tell you story chronologically (in the order your life events happened) or broken down into issues
- Repeat your key messages often!



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## Essential elements:

- Who you are (name, where you live)
- Time and facts around your story
- Challenges you faced
- How you were affected
- Don't get bogged down with small details
- Keep it clear and simple and you will make an impression!

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## Lobbying – Writing your Local MPP

**Writing a letter or an email to your local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) is powerful** – after all, taking the time to write to your MPP shows that you *really* care about your issue. So write to them – and get your friends and family to do the same.

### 1) If you don't know the name of your MPP or your Electoral District:

Go to the Elections Ontario website at [http://fyed.elections.on.ca/fyed/en/form\\_page\\_en.jsp](http://fyed.elections.on.ca/fyed/en/form_page_en.jsp) and use your postal code or address to find out.

### 2) When you know the name of your MPP or Electoral District:

Go to the Elections Ontario addresses list at

[http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members\\_current.do?locale=en&channel\\_id={923146e7-4d81-42a8-99f0-e61f5ab50387}&lang=en](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_current.do?locale=en&channel_id={923146e7-4d81-42a8-99f0-e61f5ab50387}&lang=en) to get their contact information.

Make sure to send your letter or e-mail to their Constituency Office address – that's the office in your local community.

### 3) Deciding what to write.

Speaking from your own experience can have a big effect on your local MPP. So write a letter that talks about your experience with OW or ODSP - the ways the system hurt you, failed to support you, denied you opportunities, or stopped you from reaching your full potential.

And tell them what you think a good social assistance system would look like – the rates, programs, and assistance that you think would help you and people in your community live the life you want to live.

**Keep your letter short** – two pages at the most – because your MPP or their staff will be more likely to read it that way.



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## MPP Letter Template

### DATE

Your Name

Your Address

(The Honourable) **NAME OF MPP OR MINISTER** (NOTE: Honourable is only used to address Ministers)

Title (e.g., MPP or Minister of...)

Address

**Re: Meeting request from YOUR NAME / ORGANIZATION / GROUP**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (MPP First Name, Last Name),

I am/We are members of the ODSP Action Coalition, a province-wide coalition of approximately 150 community disability agencies, provincial organizations, anti-poverty groups, legal clinics, and ODSP recipients who have been working together since 2002 to push for improvements to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) so that people with disabilities can live with justice and dignity.

The ODSP Action Coalition works closely with many people with disabilities in your riding who have struggled to survive on ODSP, or are still on Ontario Works because they have not been able to complete the complex ODSP application process.

I/We believe that any restructuring of OW and ODSP must address the range of barriers that people with disabilities currently face. While we support improvements that would make it easier and more financially rewarding for ODSP recipients to work, our experience is that employment incentives alone are inadequate as an anti-poverty strategy. Without increases to OW and ODSP rates, significant reforms to the ODSP application process, and greater access to mandatory and discretionary benefits, many singles and families on OW and ODSP will remain in poverty.

**People with disabilities need access to good education and training, on-the-job accommodations, mentoring and networking programs, better access to information, connections to community services, and assistance with transportation, employment and medical-related costs.**

I/We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these issues and ways in which we can work collaboratively to ensure that people with disabilities will no longer have to live in poverty. I/We will be in touch with you shortly to arrange a mutually convenient meeting date.

Sincerely,

Your Name



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## Lobbying Tipsheet – Meeting with Your Local MPP

**Meeting with your local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) is a powerful, personal way to get your point across.**

### **1) Find out who your MPP is and get their contact information.**

If you don't know the name of your MPP or your Electoral District, go to the Elections Ontario website at [http://fyed.elections.on.ca/fyed/en/form\\_page\\_en.jsp](http://fyed.elections.on.ca/fyed/en/form_page_en.jsp) and use your postal code or address to find out. Then go to the Elections Ontario addresses list at [http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members\\_current.do?locale=en&channel\\_id={923146e7-4d81-42a8-99f0-e61f5ab50387}&lang=en](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_current.do?locale=en&channel_id={923146e7-4d81-42a8-99f0-e61f5ab50387}&lang=en) to get their contact information.

### **2) Send your letter expressing your concerns and asking for a meeting.**

### **3) Set up an Appointment with your MPP.**

- A week or two after sending your letter, call your MPP's Constituency Office to make an appointment to meet. MPPs are usually available on Fridays in their offices. If the Legislature isn't sitting, they are available most workdays.
- Formally schedule an appointment through the MPP's assistant or appointment coordinator, even if the MPP or staff person already agreed to a meeting. Remember, lobbying starts with your first contact, so be nice to the receptionist and the administrative and executive assistants. They are the gatekeepers to your MPP. The nicer and more respectful you are to them, the more likely they are to help you get a meeting with your MPP.
- Sometimes several phone calls are needed to get a meeting. Don't be shy about being persistent! Stress how many people are also affected by the problems you wish to speak about. You will have to prove that meeting with you is a good use of the MPP's time.

### **4) Figure out who will attend the meeting.**

It is a good idea to bring other people along – but its best not to invite more than two or three people. It's also best for all the people who attend the meeting to live in the MPP's Electoral District. If you are on OW or ODSP, you might invite supportive people who work for a local agency, own a local business, or are local community, religious, or cultural leaders.



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And if you are an activist, an agency worker, a community member, or a friend or supporter of a person on OW or ODSP, make sure to invite at least one person with lived experience of the social assistance system to the meeting. And make sure that he/she has time to speak.

## 5) Preparing for the meeting.

- Call your MPP's Constituency Office to confirm the date, time and who will be at the meeting, about three to five days before the meeting. If the appointment needs to be rescheduled, be friendly and polite.
- Let the office know who will attend with you and find out how long you will have to meet with your MPP. Most appointments will be short – 15 to 30 minutes – so you need to be clear about exactly which problems you want to speak about.
- Make sure you know the most current information about the issues you want to speak about. You can use the key messages in this kit to prepare. If you want more information, you can use ODSP Action Coalition's backgrounders posted on the web.
- Telling your MPP about your experience of OW or ODSP can be hard, so you may want to make a few notes beforehand to help you remember what to say. And ask the other people who are attending the meeting with you to do the same. Use the *Lobbying Key Messages and Personal Story Sheet* in this kit to help you.
- Make sure to arrive a few minutes early for the meeting to give yourself time to get settled.

## 6) During the meeting

Be assertive rather than aggressive. Being assertive will win you more respect. Try not to get into arguments. Speak more about the solutions rather than problems.

Tell your story of how OW or ODSP has failed you or stopped you from reaching your full potential. Tell them what a good social assistance system with meaningful supports and opportunities would look like. Let them know how changes to ODSP proposed in the Social Assistance Review will affect you.

### What to Say:

- Have a plan of who will speak when and about what to make sure you cover all the points during the meeting time. This should stop people from missing important points.



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- Be friendly. Point out what you heard/seen about the MPP's views or work that you can support. You want to show that you can work with them.
- Don't spend all your time talking. Leave about 5 to 10 minutes for the MPP to ask questions. Decide who will answer MPP's questions before the meeting,
- Make sure the MPP understands what you are asking him/her to do and that you will be following up.

## 7) What to ask the MPP to do specifically

If your MPP is a government Cabinet Minister, ask them to bring up your problems/demands in Cabinet meetings.

If your MPP is a member of the government party, ask them to bring up the problems/demands at one of their caucus meetings.

If they are a member of an opposition party, ask them to bring up the problems/demands during Question Period in the legislature.

Ask your MPP to write a letter to the Minister of Community and Social Services, saying that they support your demands, and asking for an answer from this Minister.

There are also many ways your MPP can support your issue in the community:

- Hold a community meeting in the riding
- Mail out information in the riding
- Ask for reports/research from his/her staff
- Invite guest speakers (you) to the local cable channel or to community meetings
- Hold media conferences with partners (you) on problems and solutions

## 8) Follow-up

Send your MPP a follow-up letter. Thank them for meeting with you, remind them what you spoke about and what the MPP agreed to do. You can use our "After the Meeting MPP Letter Template".

At a later date, call the MPP's office to see if the MPP followed through on any promises they made. Use our "MPP Report back form" to let the ODSP Action Coalition know how your meeting went, your MPPs response to the issues, and any promises they made.



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## After the Meeting: MPP Letter Template

DATE

Your Name

Your Address

(The Honourable) **NAME OF MPP OR MINISTER** (*NOTE: Honourable is only used to address Ministers*)

Title (e.g., MPP or Minister of...)

Address

**Re: Meeting request from YOUR NAME / ORGANIZATION / GROUP**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (MPP First Name, Last Name),

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you on \_\_\_\_\_. I/We very much appreciate your interest in the issues identified by the ODSP Action Coalition and your commitment to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

I/we commend your recognition that/of **INSERT ISSUES THAT WERE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING.**

Your commitment to **INSERT WHAT THE MPP PROMISED TO DO** is appreciated.

I/We look forward to working with you during your term. If you have any questions or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Your Name





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## **MPP Report Back Form**

**Please fax or e-mail this evaluation to:**

**ODSP Action Coalition  
C/o Naomi Berlyne  
[NaomiBe@houseslink.on.ca](mailto:NaomiBe@houseslink.on.ca)  
Community Development Coordinator  
Houseslink Community Homes  
1678 Bloor St West Toronto, M6P 1A9  
Phone (416) 516-1422 ext 250  
Fax (416) 516-1344**

**Name of MPP or Cabinet Minister:**

**Constituency/Riding:**

**Date of Meeting:**

**Members Present on behalf of the ODSP Coalition:**

**Members Present from the Government:**



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**Main points you and MPP spoke about:**

**What was your MPP's response to the key messages demands?**

**What actions is s/he willing to take?**

**Is any follow-up necessary? (Further information, another meeting, etc)**

**Any additional comments?**