

October 15, 2024

Students Demand an End to Clawbacks of ODSP

To the Minister of Colleges and Universities, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Minister for Seniors and Accessibility,

On behalf of the Ontario Executive Committee of the Canadian Federation of Students, the oldest and largest provincial and national student organization, we are writing to you to express our concerns about the current state and future of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Students from across the province are concerned about the future of the ODSP, particularly students with disabilities, as their access to post-secondary education might be in jeopardy. Although the provincial government raised ODSP rates by 6.5% in July 2023, it was not enough funding to help disabled people meet their basic needs, given the high cost of living. With the anticipated Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) start date of July 2025, those on ODSP cannot wait until next summer in order to access critical funding for their basic living costs.

At \$1,308 per month, it is still drastically short of the poverty line, meaning that those with disabilities still struggle to afford basic necessities.¹ For people receiving ODSP, the monthly allocated amount is not enough to cover rent, not to mention medical expenses such as prescription drugs, vision care, travel to medical appointments, on top of high costs of groceries and utilities. In most cities and regions in Ontario, rent for a single apartment is starting at \$1,800 a month² while subsidized housing is either unavailable or unaffordable. This makes it impossible for recipients of ODSP to make ends meet.

The government views ODSP as a supplement to income. However, recipients of ODSP either rely on it to supplement their income with more funding or solely depend on it as their only source of income due to the circumstances caused by their disability, thus impacting their ability to work. ODSP is also designed to penalize individuals, limiting their earning to \$1,000 per month³, often making them no longer eligible to receive ODSP although their income remains below the poverty line. This divide between the way the government views ODSP as

¹ Powers, Lucas. "Ford promised an ODSP boost. But Ontarians with disabilities say it's not nearly enough." CBC News. June 11, 2023.

² Source: Urbanation Inc., Rentals.ca Network data

³ Working and earning on the Ontario Disability Support Program, Government of Ontario, updated April 05, 2024, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/working-and-earning-ontario-disability-support-program>



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opposed to how those who receive ODSP experience it, demonstrates the stark reality for ODSP recipients.

Those who are accessing ODSP are having difficulties applying for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) as well. Although ODSP is considered income on the OSAP application, it is expected that ODSP will cover their living expenses, while others applying for OSAP would not have the same expectations with their income and could be eligible for OSAP funding to help with their living expenses. Students with disabilities have also witnessed their OSAP or Canada Student Grants being reduced; or even asked to return their funding, due to their status with ODSP. Students should not be burdened with clawbacks from any program, regardless if the program is federally or provincially administered.

During the pandemic when CERB and CESB were available, many recipients of ODSP experienced clawbacks and continue to experience clawbacks from other provincial or federal programs. These programs are expected to help people; not penalize them for accessing necessary support. We are calling on the government to reverse any clawbacks that occurred over the last three years.

Without any action from the Ontario government, there will be continued dollar for dollar clawbacks for people accessing ODSP. Whether they are accessing OSAP, CDB, or other programs, students should not be penalized for accessing OSAP, Canada Student Grants or other student financial aids while accessing ODSP. Clawbacks only perpetuate the cycle of poverty and student debt.

Students welcome the new announcement of the Canada Disability Benefit program, but are disappointed that it is not available until next year. Students have concerns about potential clawbacks when the CDB is finally available. **The new CDB is not an opportunity to reduce ODSP, but rather an opportunity for the provincial and federal governments to work together to finally bring those relying on social support for disabilities above the poverty line.**

Students demand that the Ontario Government pledge not to make clawbacks or reduce ODSP income based on Canada Student Grants or other federal student financial assistance to post-secondary students in Ontario. We call on the Ontario Government to reverse and refund all clawbacks made in the past three years to students' ODSP income.



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Students are also calling for the Ontario government to commit to no clawbacks once the Canada Disability Benefit is available and that the CDB is seen as a top up and not a replacement of ODSP.

If you have any questions, please contact Kayla Weiler, who is the Government Relations and Policy Coordinator for the CFS-Ontario (k.weiler@cfsontario.ca). We look forward to your response.

Signed,

Adaeze Mbalaja, Ontario Chairperson
Cyrielle Ngeleka, National Executive Representative
Jaime Kearns, Treasurer