

Defending Disability

What plans to change the ODSP definition of disability would mean to Ontarians with disabilities

Proposed changes to the social assistance system in Ontario will lead to problems for many low-income people with disabilities.

In the future, low-income people with episodic or recurrent disabilities – mental illnesses, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis, for example – who qualify under the current definition would not be eligible under a new definition. If they have no other source of income, they would have to rely on Ontario Works, which has much lower benefit levels. As well, some current ODSP recipients may see a reduction or loss of benefits.

How are federal and provincial definitions different?

| | Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit | Ontario Disability Support Program |
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| Required level of disability | Severe | Substantial – significant, but not necessarily severe functional barriers |
| How long the disability has to last | Prolonged – i.e., long, continued and indefinite | Recurrent or continuous and expected to last at least one year |
| The impacts of the disability | In employment only – person must be incapable of regularly pursuing any substantial, gainful occupation | In any of three activities of daily living – personal care, community and workplace |
| Background | Developed in 1970, before the disability rights movement and before Canada signed on to the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | Flexible, inclusive and recognizes that people with disabilities may face serious barriers to getting a job, participating in the community and doing regular daily activities, even if their disability is not “severe” |