



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NORTHERN FAMILIES REELING FROM LATEST AUTISM ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of further delays for a new needs-based autism program impacts families across the North

Yesterday's announcement from Minister Todd Smith regarding delays in implementing a new needs based autism program has once again caused families across Northern Ontario additional stress and anxiety. Thunder Bay Family Network (TBFN) remains very concerned about the lack of service and diagnostic capacity across Northwestern Ontario for autism families. Early intervention for children with autism is crucial and this additional delay is cause for grave concern. Families cannot continue to wait for these essential services!

"While we are pleased to see the implementation committee has been announced, it is deeply disappointing to not see a representative from the Northwest appointed, as per our recommendations to the autism advisory panel" notes TBFN President, Sharon Bak. The inclusion of an indigenous representative and Sherry Fournier, Executive Director of Child and Community Resources, as members is gratefully acknowledged. This issue is extremely complex and will take time, however the current emergency in the North related to loss of service capacity has been caused by the original plan as announced in February by former Minister Lisa MacLeod continues to be ignored by this government.

Families continue to work hard at raising their issues and TBFN is proud to support the efforts of Northern Autism Families Matter and the Northern Ontario Autism Alliance who, just last week, advocated on behalf of Northern needs at Queens Park. Family voices truly do make a difference and we encourage other families to engage with these groups and work together. "As we have previously stated, this issue is much bigger than the autism file" states Bak, "We continue to engage with all families who are concerned about their loved ones future and what will happen with housing, lack of funding for the Passport/Special Services at Home programs, lack of adequate supports in the education system, and so much more". The family movement has resulted in great strides being made over the years but much more work remains to be done in ensuring that what has been gained is not lost. Families deserve choice and every opportunity for their loved one to live the life of their choosing. TBFN continues to stand with all families and will advocate as necessary for their voices to be heard.

Thunder Bay Family Network is an autonomous, family led organization that seeks to nurture the strengths, dreams, and enthusiasms of individuals with a developmental disability and their families.
www.tbfn.ca

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