

# Passport – Individualized Funding for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Easter Seals Ontario advocates for children and youth with physical disabilities and provides information about the special education system. Some children and youth with physical disabilities also have a developmental disability. The government of Ontario funds a variety of services and supports for children and adults with developmental disabilities. This article looks at one program called Passport that provides individualized funding for adults with developmental disabilities. Families who are planning for the transition from high school may consider applying for Passport funding the [Developmental Services Ontario](#). Planning for an application to Developmental Services Ontario can be part of the transition plan developed in the Individual Education Plan.

## **Background:**

Families have been the foundation of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities for over 70 years. Families in the 1940's and 1950's felt that sending their children away to big institutions was not the answer and started forming their own community based organizations. This was the foundation for the community living movement which established agencies across the province. As time went by families wanted more for their children and there was a push away from group homes and programs to a more individualized approach to support. Some of these parents started advocating for individualized funding, funding that was given to the families to plan and support the person to do what they wanted.

The last 25 years has seen a significant transformation of the developmental service system with the closure of all of the large institutions and an emphasis on person directed planning and individualized funding. The most recent announcement, in 2014, of an increase of \$810 million dollars for developmental services, has included an increased share for individualized funding, delivered through a program called [Passport](#).

Adults, over the age of 18 years, with developmental disabilities can apply for Passport funding of up to \$35,000 per person per year through Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), although the average amount allocated is closer to \$10,000 per year. Individualized funding can be used to purchase services from an agency or fund a variety of supports that are chosen by the individual, with support from their families.

Individualized funding has opened a world of possibilities for adults with developmental disabilities. The funding enables the child to remain in the family home and live an active life in the community, or to move out and live in a home of their choice, with the necessary services and supports.

The individualized approach to planning and supporting each person is consistent with what we each want for ourselves, choices and the power to make our own decisions (and mistakes). But the move to an individualized funding approach by a government agency creates many challenges in terms of resource allocation and accountability. The wait lists for Passport funding have been very long and continue to be a wait of at least 2 years. The amount of funds allocated is appreciated but in many cases insufficient to support all of the needs. In addition, the accountability process is time consuming with funding provided to families, after services have been delivered, when detailed monthly reports are submitted.

Managing individualized funding is not easy and can be

challenging for many parents, and fortunately, there are agencies that will manage the Passport funds for an administration fee (up to 10% of the Passport funding). Many more families choose to manage the funds themselves and this means each family managing the hiring (and firing) of people who have the skills or knowledge to provide the necessary services and supports. Parents need to develop management skills and have responsibility for recruitment, supervision and monitoring of support personnel. In addition, they may need to prepare contracts and payment schedules, with associated budgeting and financial management. And there are challenges in finding qualified support persons willing to work as independent contractors without benefits or job security. The Developmental Services Ontario website has tips and information for families on [hiring workers](#).

Despite those reservations, applying for Passport funds can be the start of a fulfilling life for your child. Passport funds can be used to:

- **Community Participation and Activities of Daily Living** – cost of programs that develop independence, social and life skills, club memberships, admission to sports and other events, pre-employment and employment supports, transportation and personal support works to help with community participation and daily living activities
- **Caregiver Respite** – a break for the primary caregiver in or out of home
- **Person Directed Planning** – funds to hire a facilitator to help identify personal goals and develop a plan to achieve the goals
- **Administration** – Up to 10% to an agency who manages the Passport funding and individual supports

For more details see the Fact Sheet: Passport Funding: What can I use it for?

[passport-funding-what-can-i-use-it-for](#)

An application for Passport funding is made through [Developmental Services Ontario \(DSO\)](#) who determines eligibility for developmental services and connects families with community programs and supports. A student may apply for Passport funding part of their plan for the transition out of high school, and can, once approved, receive funds even while they are still at school. Transition planning activities can be documented in the transition plan section of the Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Recent changes to the Passport program include the following:

- Students who are eighteen years of age may now be considered for Passport funding while they are still in school.
- Adults with a developmental disability who are receiving (or eligible to receive) Ontario Disability Support Program Employment Supports may now be considered for Passport funding.
- Individuals participating in a ministry-funded day program may now also receive Passport funding, if available, at the same time.

Check the [Developmental Services Ontario](#) website for more information on eligibility and applying for Passport funding.