



Q: Do you have a timeline in mind for the actual removal of IQ70 and how will you accommodate the needs of those who have been denied services for years?

As a government, we are proud to launch an Autism Action Plan, and to eliminate the IQ70 eligibility criterion. Through our Autism Action Plan, eliminating the IQ70 criteria is a medium term action to be substantially completed by March 2021.

Implementation of the 46 actions will occur in three phases, with all to be substantially completed in year three (March 2022). The Autism Action Plan has been developed to support sustainable, systemic changes to meet the needs of all persons with ASD.

Q: What is your position on additional tools for developmental screening to ensure those flagged for early signs of ASD receive timely and appropriate referrals? Further, will your party consider allocating funding for a Public Information Campaign about early signs of autism?

The first of six focus areas of our Autism Action Plan is Awareness, Acceptance, Diagnosis and Assessment of ASD.

Raising ASD awareness will increase understanding amongst decision makers, service providers, parents and other stakeholders, and more broadly speaking, will raise the profile of ASD for a greater understanding amongst the general public. Awareness raising will contribute to earlier diagnosis and intervention. Research demonstrates improved outcomes for children who are diagnosed at younger ages and who subsequently receive appropriate early intervention and supports.

Implementation of focus area number one will result in:

- Increased public awareness of the core features of ASD.
- Increased ASD awareness by delivering sessions to frontline staff who provide services or could potentially provide services to individuals living with ASD.
- Routine monitoring for early signs of ASD for siblings of children diagnosed with ASD through surveillance by health professionals.
- Increased access to supportive counselling and support groups for families living with ASD.
- Availability of a toolkit for individuals and families, which provides critical information upon diagnosis.
- Improved data collection across the lifespan on the number of individuals living with ASD availing of services and supports through the regional health authorities and in the education system.
- Reduced wait times for ASD diagnosis by aligning diagnostic procedures with national standards.
- More diagnostic clinics for children and adults within each regional health authority.

- New assessment tools targeting the core features of ASD for children and youth to assist with support planning and program development.
- New standardized assessment tools for community supports that target individualized support needs for adults living with developmental disabilities including ASD.
- Enhanced diagnostic summary reports that outline individual strengths and needs, ASD symptoms, recommendations for intervention and information on support services and materials for individuals receiving the diagnosis of ASD.

Budget 2019 commits 2.5 million for plan implementation, which will increase to an annual ongoing investment of \$5 million, and as outlined above, includes as priority areas awareness raising and new standardized assessment tools.

Q: How do you plan to increase accountability with the ISSP and IEP process?

As a government, we are committed to providing the best possible education system for our students. One of our first actions as a government was the establishment of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes.

Following extensive consultation with and input from key stakeholders like ASNL, school districts, Memorial University, parents and students; and informed by jurisdictional reviews, scholarly research and data from a number of sources; a final report with 82 recommendations was submitted to government. Recommendations focus on areas in the education system, including mental health and wellness, inclusive education, mathematics, literacy, Indigenous education, multicultural education, co-operative education, early years, and teacher education and professional development.

In 2018, our Government launched an Education Action Plan in response to the Premier's Task Force, and to date, 31 of the 82 recommendations in the Education Action Plan have already been implemented and many more are underway.

One of the priority areas the Premier's Task Force was asked to focus on was inclusive education.

The task force heard what we all know to be true: that the approach to inclusive education, introduced in 2009 as a model of delivering supports to students with exceptionalities, has not been working. Given inclusive education was implemented with no policy to support it, it is not surprising the approach of the former administration had failed students, teachers and staff alike.

The task force recommended that a new Student Support Services Policy be developed to clearly articulate a different approach for the provision of programming and supports. Teachers will collaboratively design learning experiences for students using a tiered, student-centered structure to inform the level of intervention that is most appropriate. The focus will be on providing a learning environment where responsive teaching is the norm.

This new policy would have a particular focus on:

- effectively using small group instruction, both in and out of regular classroom;
- establishing appropriate, individual programs that ensure all children are in school for a full day and prevent children from being sent home;
- defining complex needs with an interdepartmental commitment to reactivate the Individual Student Support Program (ISSP) model for students receiving services from more than one government department;
- transitioning all students with special needs between the early years programs and kindergarten and between each grade level;
- partnering effectively with early years/child care programs and creating an early identification and intervention system for children with special needs;
- including ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure student needs are being met; and providing department-led professional learning on a new special education policy to ensure consistency.

In addition to a new Student Support Services Policy, we are committed to:

- the introduction of teaching and learning assistants, working under the direction of classroom teachers, to offer instructional support to students;
- mechanisms and processes for the smooth transfer of student information and documentation from early years child care and intervention programs to school, across grade levels, and into post-secondary institutions, so that no instructional time is lost at any level for planning and assignment of support personnel;
- a seamless, year-round provision of services from education/health professionals for children and youth who have an assessed need for health interventions;
- streamlined, coordinated supports and services across departments for children with complex needs;
- the principles of Universal Design for Learning included in curriculum as it is renewed, and in the design of the learning environment, to produce more flexible learning opportunities for all learners;
- strengthened linkages between health and education policies and personnel to improve professional support services to children and youth;
- improvements to initial teacher education programs and professional learning in the areas of exceptionalities and student behaviour; and
- the optimum use of assistive technology through professional learning for teachers and effective management and deployment of resources.

Our Autism Action Plan addresses all aspects of living with ASD, including awareness, diagnosis and assessment, educational programming and other interventions and services that provide support for individuals and their families.

Individuals, families and caregivers require clinically-sound information from appropriately and timely information about assessments, support plans, individualized education plans and available resources. Family and caregiver education is associated with improved outcomes and reduced stress for individuals and their families. In addition, the use of effective teaching methods for individuals with ASD results in more adaptive skills, giving family members increased access to social options and more quality time for one another.

Information and supports that will be made available to parents, families and caregivers include:

- Information on evidence-based ASD treatments and supports;
- Details about specific teaching strategies to help acquire new skills and behaviours;
- Information on understanding how ASD influences learning and behaviour; and,
- Help in coping with the emotional stress that may result from having a family member who is living with ASD.

Q: What steps would you take to improve access to the workforce for those with ASD?

Workforce participation provides benefits beyond a pay cheque. Employment helps foster a sense of belonging and contribution to one's community.

Elimination of the IQ70 criterion will remove an arbitrary and unfair barrier to supports for persons with ASD.

Some of the results we hope to achieve through our action plan as it relates to workforce participation are:

- Increased opportunities for individuals living with ASD to attain skills and qualifications through access to appropriate training programs, social enterprise and youth employment programs.
- Increased partnerships with the private sector, not-for-profit and co-operative organizations to encourage social enterprise opportunities, and to support, fund and mentor entrepreneurship for individuals living with ASD.
- Enhanced promotion of existing programs and employment supports for individuals living with ASD.
- Exploration of initiatives aimed at improving transitions to post-secondary.
- Increased ASD-specific accessibility initiatives including transportation, visual supports, and communications.