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THE SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO  
SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE  
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.



## **Financial Dignity for Ontarians with Disabilities**

(from Fall / Winter issue of the Advocate)

SSO and the Ontario Psychiatric Association (OPA) have launched a joint advocacy campaign - **The Financial Dignity for Ontarians with Disabilities Campaign.**

Through this campaign we are urging Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) to support a 10% increase to Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates. We are committed to ensuring that people who are unable to work because they suffer from mental illness receive sufficient benefits to live with dignity.

According to the World Health Organization, mental illnesses account for five of the ten leading causes of disability in developed countries. Mental illness can severely impact a person's ability to secure and maintain employment. For instance, less than 20% of people with schizophrenia are employed in the competitive market place.

People with severe mental illnesses are over represented among the poor and homeless populations. While poverty does not cause severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, many individuals with mental illness end up living in poverty because their illness deprives them of the ability to work. Poverty, in turn, increases people's stress which can trigger exacerbations of illness.

In Ontario over one-third (36%) of people receiving ODSP live with a mental illness. Half of these, approximately 35,000 people, suffer from psychosis related illnesses such as schizophrenia.

The meager level of financial support provided by ODSP has consigned ODSP recipients to a life of poverty. ODSP benefits have increased by only 3% since 1993. Even with the 10% increase that we are asking for, the cumulative raise over the last 13 years will be a less than 1% per annum, well below increases in the cost of living.

From now to May 2006 when the next provincial budget will be tabled, we are asking SSO and OPA members (psychiatrists) to team up and meet with their local MPP to:

- 1) Inform him/her about the difficulties of living on the low rates of ODSP, and
- 2) Ask him/her to support a 10% increase to ODSP rates in the 2006 Budget.

You can support this campaign by meeting with your MPP or sending him / her a letter asking for a 10% increase. SSO and OPA have developed joint campaign materials to assist our members in their advocacy. For more information about the campaign contact Ursula Lipski ([ulipski@schizophrenia.on.ca](mailto:ulipski@schizophrenia.on.ca) or 416-449-6830) or visit [www.schizophrenia.on.ca](http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca).