**Evaluation of an Information Support Program for Parents Accessing Services within an Individualized Funding Model: Autism Ontario’s Service Navigation Program**

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**Objectives:** In April 2019, Ontario’s Ministry of Child Community and Social Services (MCCSS) began transitioning from an autism centre-based funding model to an individualized funding model (or, direct funding model) for providing autism services to children and youth. Individualized funding models are promoted as a means to increase choice within publicly funded systems by providing families with self-directed budgets to purchase eligible services according to their preference. Among the greatest concerns with this model has been providing adequate information to families to enable equitable access to budgets and support informed choices. To support families’ informational needs within the individualized funding-based Ontario Autism Program (OAP), the MCCSS funded Autism Ontario to develop and implement the OAP Service Navigation Program (SNP). The purpose of this poster is to describe early experience implementing the SNP by reporting results of an ongoing program evaluation.

**Method:** Development of the SNP, including training of regional service navigators, was informed by a jurisdictional scan and a framework for providing information in individualized funding programs. Among other responsibilities (e.g., direct parent support, outreach activities), service navigators provided Childhood Budget Workshops to promote access and use of funds. Results below include second quarter (Q2) program evaluation highlights, and a survey of 133 parents who attended 34 Childhood Budget Workshops in September 2019.

**Results:** In its first 6 months, the program’s reach was actively extended through: connections made by the program’s 18 regional service navigators with over 300 community agencies, online campaigns (e.g., Facebook ads, newsletters), and translation of promotional materials to 14 languages (beyond standard French language services). In Q2, service navigators had 1165 unique family contacts, and number of service navigation requests (1392) increased 245% from Q1. In the Childhood Budget Workshop survey, participants generally found workshops useful (98%; n=51), although not everyone necessarily felt better equipped to complete paperwork to access the program and manage funds (88%; n=49). Regarding barriers to managing funds, 50% felt they did not know what services their child needs, 33% did not know where to access services, and 34% did not know how to begin accessing services (n*=*42). Future program elements to be evaluated include a goal setting process, and peer-to-peer mentorship. Further results (to at least Q3) will be available by the conference.

**Discussion/Conclusions:** Childhood Budget Workshop survey findings are consistent with findings from other jurisdictions (e.g., Australia) regarding the significant knowledge gaps within many families, which represent barriers to equitable access and informed use of self-directed budgets to purchase services. This highlights the importance and need for a robust informational service like the SNP in Ontario. The full program evaluation results, including future Childhood Budget Workshop surveys, will be useful to policy makers in jurisdictions that provide or are considering providing informational services for families within an individualized funding model.

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