



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **PROGRAM PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE GROWS AGAIN** **“Direct Funding has given me access to more choices in my life”**

When Meenu Sikand wakes up in the morning, she doesn't have to think or worry about who will help her get out of bed and get ready for work. A paraplegic since 1986, Ms. Sikand lives in Woodbridge, north of Toronto, with her husband, teenaged son and elderly mother. She relies on attendants to help with activities of daily living, including transferring, showering and dressing.

But, instead of waiting for an agency to send a personal support worker to her – perhaps at a time that is not convenient for her and her work in accessibility planning for the Region of Peel – Ms. Sikand has a handful of attendants whom she recruited, hired, trained and now schedules to suit her needs. These workers are employed and paid by Ms. Sikand, a participant in the Direct Funding program since 1999. She receives monthly funds to employ the attendants of her choice.

The program, which is funded by the province, is being expanded once again to allow more Ontarians with disabilities to live independently in their homes. There are currently about 900 participants on the program. This is the third expansion in as many years for the Direct Funding program; with the latest expansion the program expects to fund approximately 1,000 individuals by 2018 to manage their own care based on their individual needs.

“Direct Funding has given me access to more choices in my life regarding where and when I pursue my employment” said Ms. Sikand. “It has allowed me to meet my obligations as a mother, a wife, a daughter, an employee and an active member of my community.

“I have been nothing but thrilled by the way the Direct Funding program works and how well it's organized not only to accommodate real-life events but to make it feel like you actually have a real life.”

Program manager Leisa DeBono said the latest funding increase shows that the province sees the value of the self-managed program. She added that the provincial government has shown its confidence in the philosophy of the program – namely, choice, flexibility and control – and the Independent Living movement in general.

“I think the government has seen that our program can reach more people faster and with less red tape than with almost any other program,” said Ms. DeBono. “Putting funds directly into the hands of participants means it goes so much farther than it could through an agency.”

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING IN TORONTO  
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In operation for more than 20 years, Direct Funding has helped more than 1,400 people with disabilities to stay in their homes, live in their communities, work, go to school and raise children. The program is administered by the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto and is available anywhere in the province.

Funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care through the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network, the program also eases pressure on Community Care Access Centres and other community support providers, freeing them up for other individuals.

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**NOTE TO MEDIA:** The Direct Funding Program has 900 participants across the province; please ask about local participants in your area who would be willing to be interviewed about the program.

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