



The Ontario Disability Support Program: An Overview of the Trends

Smith-Carrier, Tracy and Kerr, Don "The Ontario Disability Support Program: An Overview of the Trends" *CRDCN research-policy snapshots*.
January 2022

What the researchers did

The researchers offer an overview of the trends in the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), including descriptive statistics, caseload profiles, and trajectories relative to Ontario Works (OW). Using the postal code conversion file, they observed trends across Census Metropolitan Areas.

What the researchers found

The ODSP caseload has rapidly risen, from about 280,000 in 2003 to over 475,000 in 2016, an increase of about 70%. The researchers estimated that demography alone can be considered responsible for only about 28% of the overall growth in ODSP over the 2003-2014 period (Kerr et al., 2017). In Kerr et al. (2019), the researchers found that the ODSP participation rate in high unemployment Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) (e.g., Windsor, St. Catherine's-Niagara, London) had higher social assistance participation rates than those areas with low unemployment (e.g., Guelph-Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa). In terms of the composition of the caseload, 56% of ODSP participants had a diagnosis of "mental disorder" in 2014.

RDC Datasets used

**Ontario Ministry of Community
and Social Services administrative
datafiles**

Policy areas this research can inform

- Children and youth
- Education, training and learning
- Income, pensions, spending and wealth
- Labour

Policy implications of this research

The ODSP caseload increased by 70% over the 2003 to 2016 period. The Great Recession of 2008 had a pronounced impact on Ontarians living with low income, with a reduced employment rate, a tightening labour force, and increased competition for jobs, all of which had a direct impact on (both the OW and) ODSP caseload. With a growing proportion of persons on ODSP, we have seen a shift from social assistance for those deemed "temporarily jobless" to those deemed "disabled" and in need of longer-term assistance.

Read the full article

Kerr, D., Smith-Carrier, T., & Wang, J. (2019). From temporary financial assistance to longer term income support: Probing the growth in Ontario's Disability Support Program (ODSP). *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 79, 11-31. <https://crsp.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/crsp/article/view/40301>

Kerr, D., Smith-Carrier, T., Wang, J., Kwok, S-M., & Tam, D. (2017). Population aging and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 6(4), 33-55. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v6i4.382>

