



JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

STATEMENT

The Ontario Physiotherapy Association (OPA) supports reforms and improved administration of Jordan's Principle funding to ensure First Nations children have sustainable access to needed services, including physiotherapy and rehabilitation, that is equitable, timely, collaborative and culturally safe.

To consider effective reforms to streamline the administrative processes of Jordan's Principle funding, and to achieve sustainable and accessible physiotherapy services for First Nations children, OPA recognizes that:

- Systemic barriers for First Nations children and communities to access physiotherapy services need to be reduced, with the goal of elimination;
- Services must be designed, delivered and funded in ways that are culturally safe for First Nations peoples, which includes collaborative co-design, and respect for the principles of ownership, control, access and possession of health information;
- Service contracts must promote continuity of care to foster longitudinal relationships with trusted partners;
- That administrative capacity must be increased, and there must be transparency and accountability to applicants and providers in addressing the backlog and ensuring timely access to care;
- Physiotherapy by physiotherapists is an essential service that includes evidence-based preventive care and early intervention, in addition to sustained care.

BACKGROUND

Jordan's Principle is a human rights principle established by Canada's Federal Government to eliminate gaps in service and to ensure that First Nations children have access to the same level of public services as other children in Canada – regardless of where they live. The government department of first contact is responsible for ensuring the service is provided, even if it not their responsibility and that the service is paid for, with the ability to seek reimbursement as needed. It is a child-first principle to ensure no child goes without a service due to a dispute between or across levels of government.

In 2024 and early 2025, the backlog of applications to funding for services through Jordan's Principle has delayed and, in some cases, prevented First Nations children from accessing services, an outcome that runs counter to its purpose. With the significant increase in funding applications each year, the Minister of Indigenous Services announced in February 2025 that Indigenous Services Canada will continue to work on reforms to ensure the



sustainability of Jordan's Principle to fill service gaps and establish coordinated and integrated services to better meet the needs of First Nations children.

ELIMINATING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

Jordan's Principle is an important step in both acknowledging the challenges experienced by Indigenous peoples in accessing services and finding ways to reduce those barriers. Unfortunately, additional barriers have arisen with the growing number of applications, and effective solutions must be developed to continue the work of addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. As the need for services continues to increase, data from Jordan's Principle funding should be reviewed to identify opportunities for more sustained service delivery to meet the needs of Indigenous children. By enabling access to services, Jordan's Principle can contribute to closing gaps in health outcomes, where Indigenous peoples experience increased risks of adverse health outcomes, a consequence of previous Canadian government policies and systemic biases.

CULTURALLY SAFE HEALTH SERVICES

Health services must be designed, provided and funded in ways that are culturally safe for people accessing care, with a collaborative approach to co-design with communities and individuals where that service is needed. The work to reform and improve service provision must include collaborative discussion with Indigenous peoples and communities, as well as service providers with longitudinal experience and relationships with First Nations community partners.

Service providers and administrators must act on the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access and possession of health information, which should be embedded in service contracts as well as administrative policies of this federal initiative. By communicating how organizations will prioritize each of those principles to support how First Nations people have authority over the collection and use of health information. Consultation with and participation by Indigenous people and communities to co-design such processes is essential.

CONTINUITY OF CARE

Continuity of care is an important part of culturally safe healthcare services - to build trust and relationships over time, without the risk of services ending due to administrative reasons rather than the individual's or community's need for that service.

Interruptions to ongoing services, or the risk that services will stop, can damage the trust that has developed over time between clients, communities, and health service providers. Contracts and administrative processes must promote the continuity of longitudinal



relationships, an essential part of safe and effective health care. OPA has heard from rehabilitation service providers who have been placed in the difficult position of needing to continue services because they are essential to the health and well-being of their clients, in part due to a lack of clarity on applications pending approval. In addition to not receiving compensation for many months, communities and providers also face the risk that applications for contracts may not ultimately be approved.

Reforms of the application process must consider how to ensure clients and communities do not go without services when care continuity is needed, and providers should be assured of appropriate compensation. Contracts that are longer than one year should be considered as appropriate and based on the specific person or community as well as the assessment of the health professional. Other models may be considered where extensions of an initial block of service provision are approved by a more streamlined, time-sensitive, and less onerous process.

PHYSIOTHERAPY IS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

Physiotherapists provide essential healthcare services to people of all ages experiencing health issues in musculoskeletal, neurological, cardiovascular, respiratory, and metabolic systems. Assessment and interventions by physiotherapists lead to prompt diagnoses and treatment plans that enable people to return to their daily lives, including school, work, home activities, with less pain and increased functional abilities. As an upstream intervention, prompt access to physiotherapy services by physiotherapists can prevent additional complications or increased symptoms. Delays in access to physiotherapy may lead to longer recovery times, increased pain and dysfunction, as well as increased stress about health issues. The essential nature of services provided by physiotherapists was recognized by the Ontario and Canadian governments during the COVID-19 pandemic, as physiotherapists were authorized to provide emergency care in-person.¹

Consequently, it is important that physiotherapy services awaiting approval through Jordan's Principle continue to be recognized as essential services, and not be subject to stoppages, especially when due to administrative processes and delays.

¹ Government of Canada. Guidance on Essential Services and Functions in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Annex A: Essential Services and Functions by Critical Infrastructure Sector. Last updated, 14 Oct 2021. [Archived]. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrct/crtcl-nfrstrctr/esf-sfe-en.aspx>