

Autism Services

A Financial Review of Autism Services and Program Design
Considerations for the New Ontario Autism Program



FAO

**FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY
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Purpose and Structure

Purpose: To provide MPPs with information on the Province's autism services and program design considerations for the new Ontario Autism Program (new OAP), which is scheduled to be in place by 2021.

The report has two main sections:

- An overview of autism services, spending and the waitlist to 2019-20.
- Program design considerations for the new OAP.

Autism in Ontario

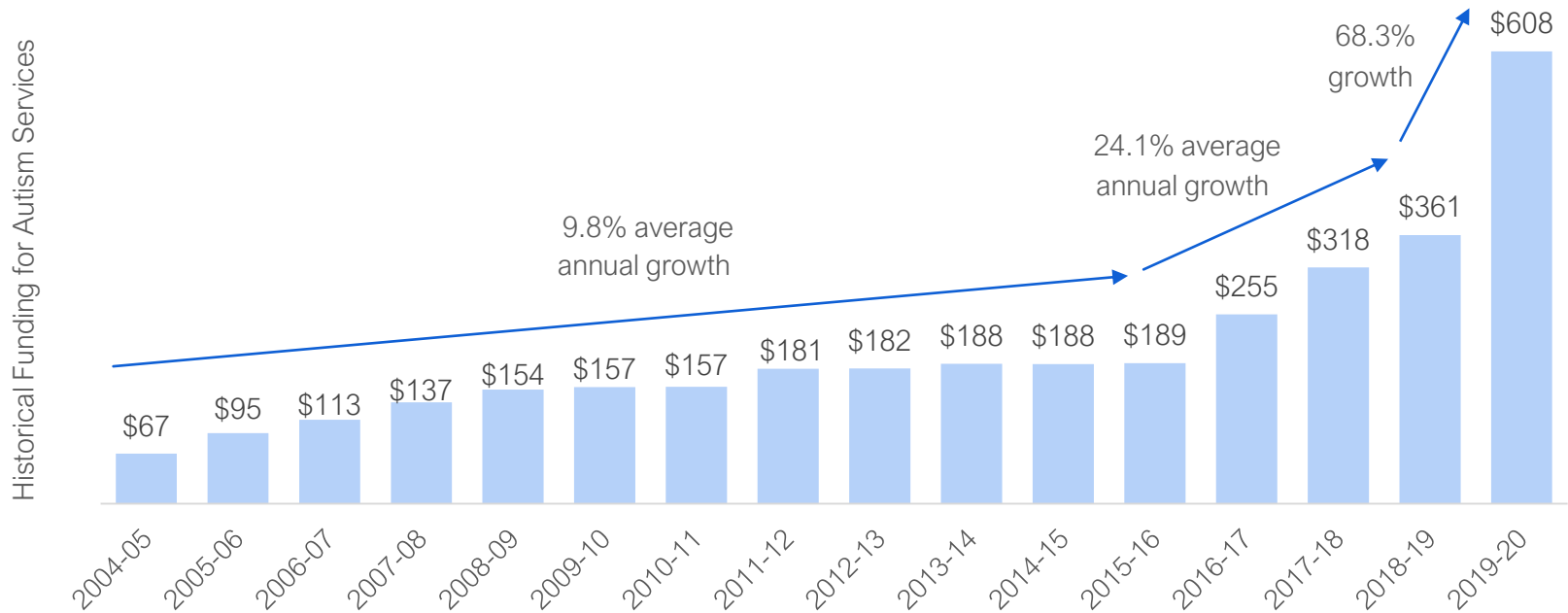
- Autism spectrum disorder (autism) is a lifelong neurological disorder that can affect a person's behaviour, social interactions and ability to communicate.
- The FAO estimates that there are about 42,000 children and youth living with autism in Ontario in 2020.
- Behavioural therapy services to improve language, communication and social skills can cost up to \$95,000 per year.

Ontario Autism Services

- The Province provides a number of different autism services. In recent years, there have been material changes to the Province's programs, including:
 - Starting in 2011, the Province offered separate intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) and applied behavioural analysis (ABA) programs, each with their own waitlist.
 - In 2017, the Ontario Autism Program merged therapy services and increased funding to address the growing integrated waitlist.
 - In 2019, age-based Childhood Budgets replaced the OAP to eliminate the waitlist.
- Later in 2019, the Province announced that it would replace Childhood Budgets with a new needs-based OAP by 2021.
- In 2020, children are receiving support through the old OAP and Childhood Budgets (includes interim one-time funding).

Autism Services Spending

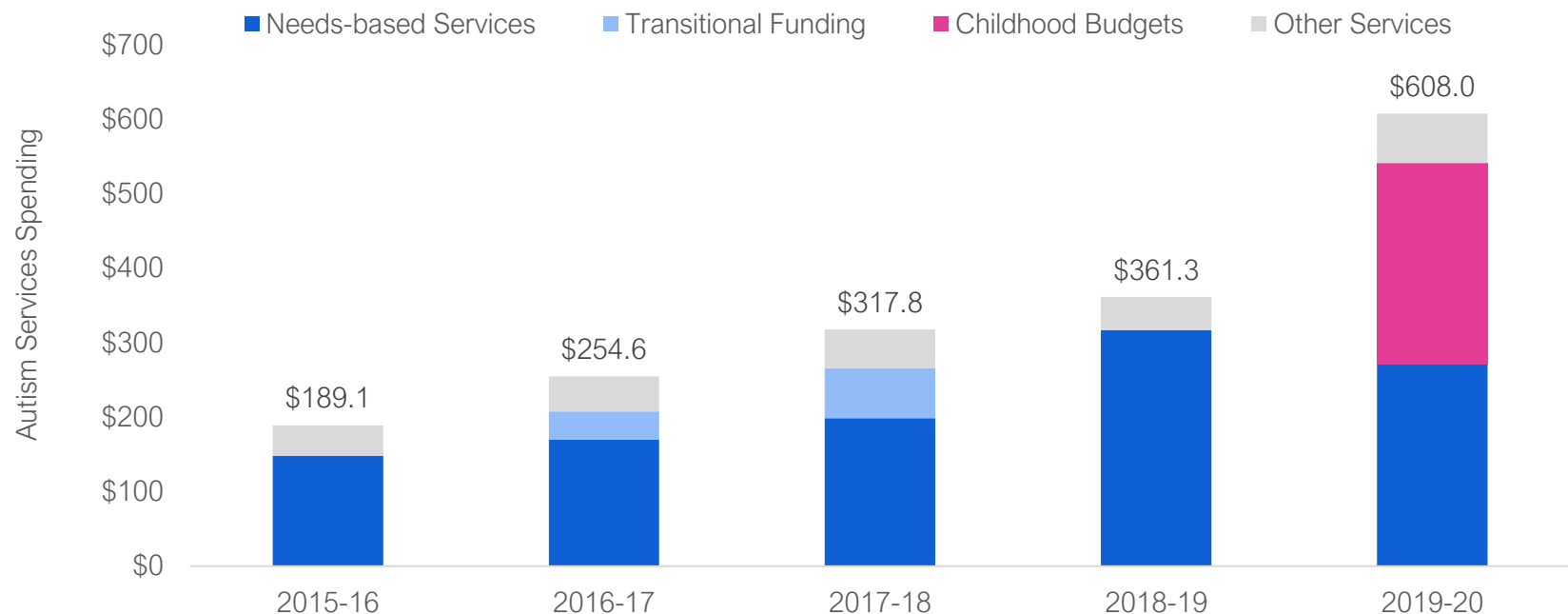
- From 2004-05 to 2019-20, spending on autism services grew from \$67 million to \$608 million, a nearly 10x increase.



Source: The Public Accounts of Ontario and FAO analysis of information provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Autism Services Spending cont'd

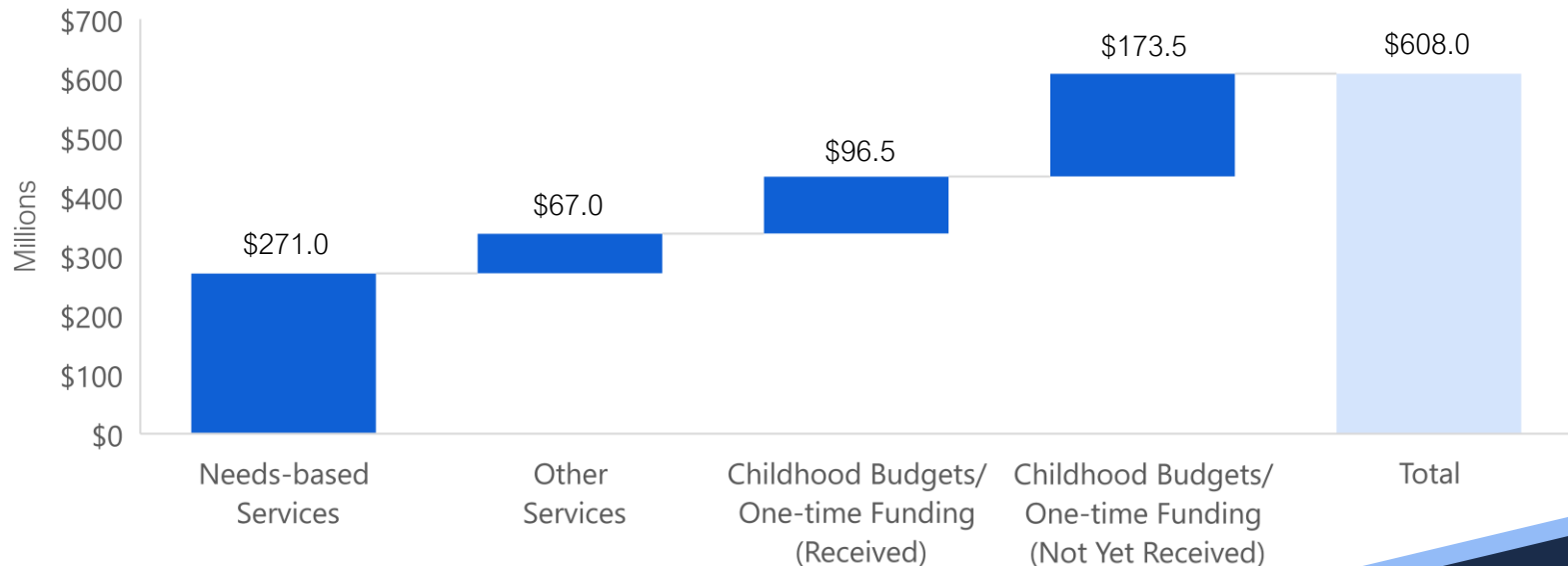
- From 2015-16 to 2019-20, autism services spending grew at an average of 34 per cent per year.
 - Largest spending category was needs-based services (e.g., IBI/ABA therapy programs and then the OAP).



Note: Childhood Budgets includes interim one-time funding.
Source: FAO analysis of data from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

2019-20 Autism Services Spending

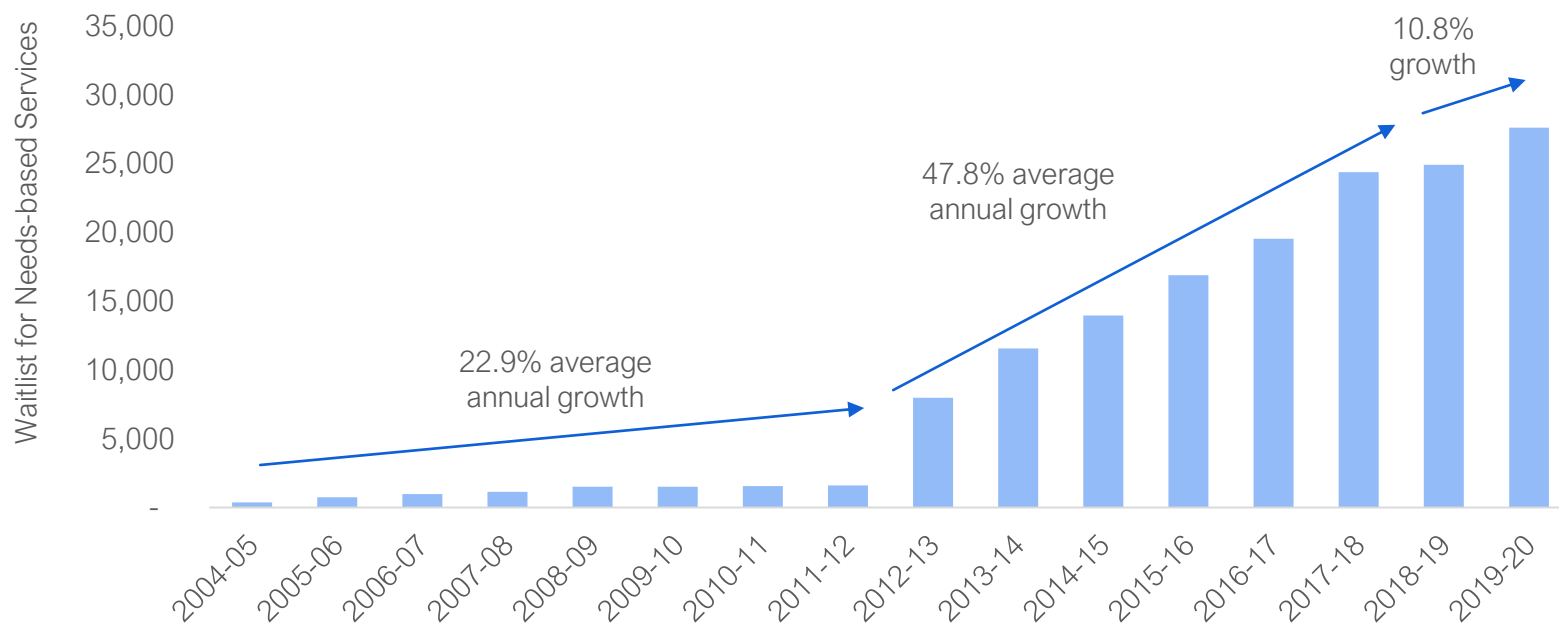
- In 2019-20, the Province recorded total unaudited spending of \$608 million.
- Includes accrued expense of \$174 million for families of 25,100 children who did not receive Childhood Budget or interim one-time funding payments by the end of the fiscal year (March 31, 2020).
 - MPPs should confirm with the Auditor General of Ontario that the Province can record the full accrued expense of \$174 million as spending in 2019-20.



Source: FAO analysis of data from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Waitlist for Needs-Based Autism Services

- Starting in 2011-12, expanded program eligibility led to even greater demand for needs-based services.
- In 2019-20, the waitlist reached 27,600 as the ministry stopped enrolling children into needs-based services under the OAP and moved to Childhood Budgets.

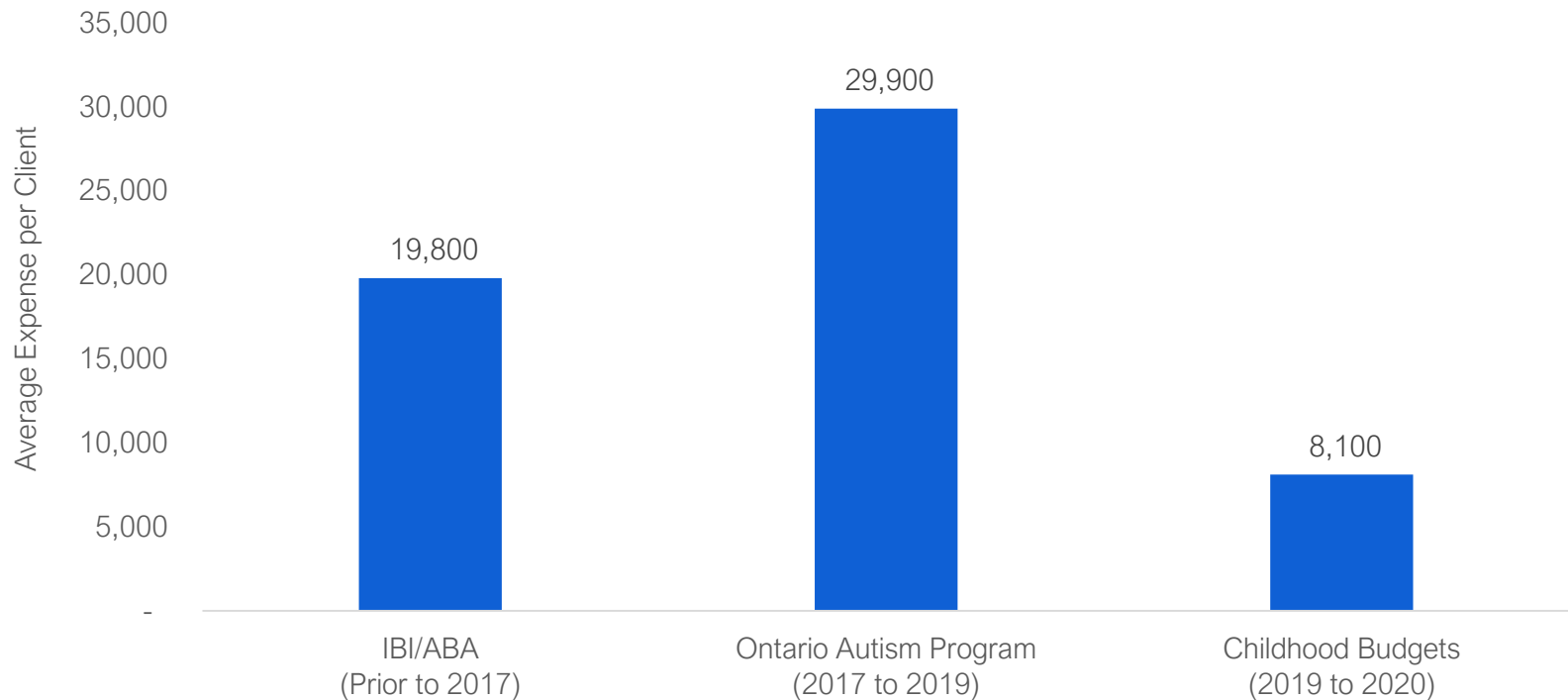


Note: 2004-05 to 2011-12 represents the waitlist for IBI services, 2012-13 to 2016-17 represents the waitlist for ABA services, and 2017-18 to 2018-19 represents the OAP waitlist. The 2019-20 waitlist includes 8,100 children who received Childhood Budgets or interim one-time funding.

Source: FAO analysis of data from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Spending per Client under Different Programs

- There is a significant difference in the average annual cost per client under the three distinct autism programs offered since 2011 (2020 \$).



Note: IBI/ABA represents historical intensive behavioural intervention and applied behavioural analysis programs between 2011 and 2017.
Source: FAO analysis of information provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

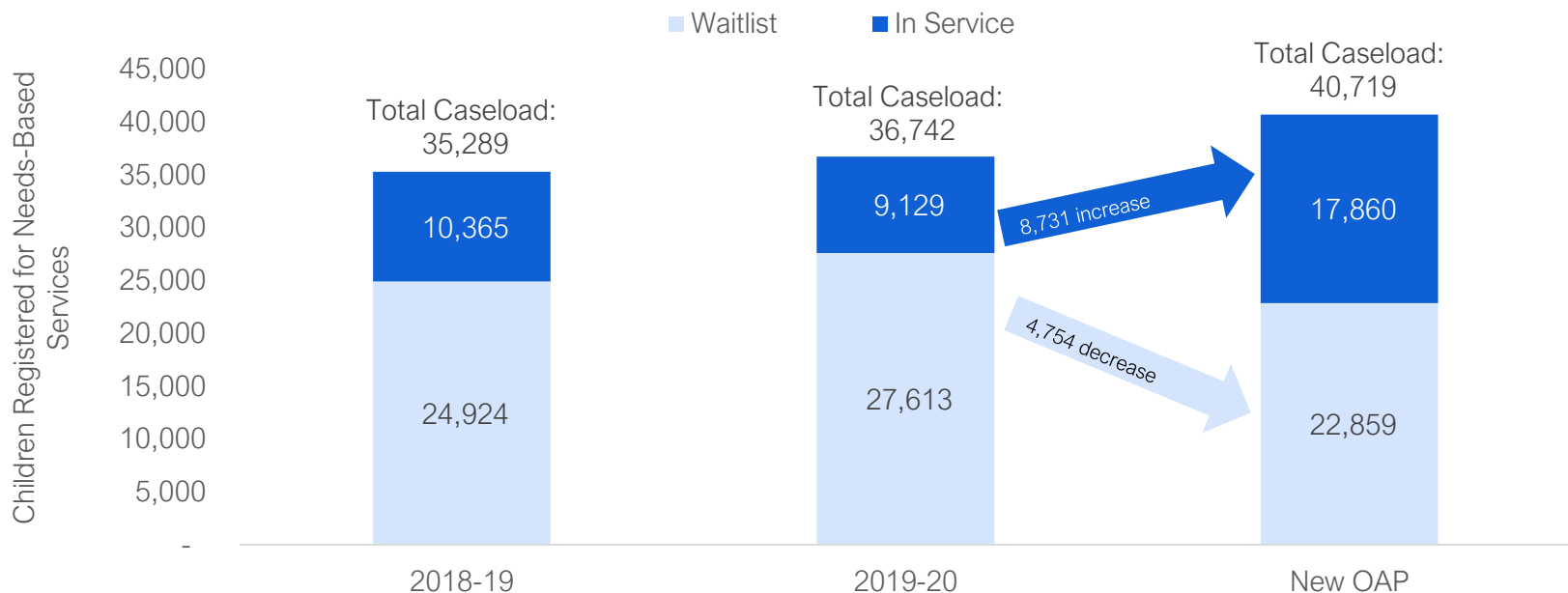
The New OAP: Program Design Considerations

Overview

- The Province has committed to create a new needs-based OAP with an annual budget of \$600 million.
 - One objective is to move a minimum of 8,000 children off the waitlist into needs-based services in first year.
- The new OAP is expected to be fully implemented in 2021.
- To support MPPs' review of the new OAP, the FAO developed program design scenarios with the following variables: budget, service level, number of clients served and waitlist.

Scenario 1: Fixed Budget and 2019 OAP Service Level

- With a fixed annual budget of \$600 million and 2019 OAP service levels (\$29,900 per client), the FAO projects:
 - 17,860 children would be able to access needs-based support each year, up by 8,700 from 2019.
 - The waitlist would be 22,900 children, a reduction of 4,800 from the waitlist in 2019-20.

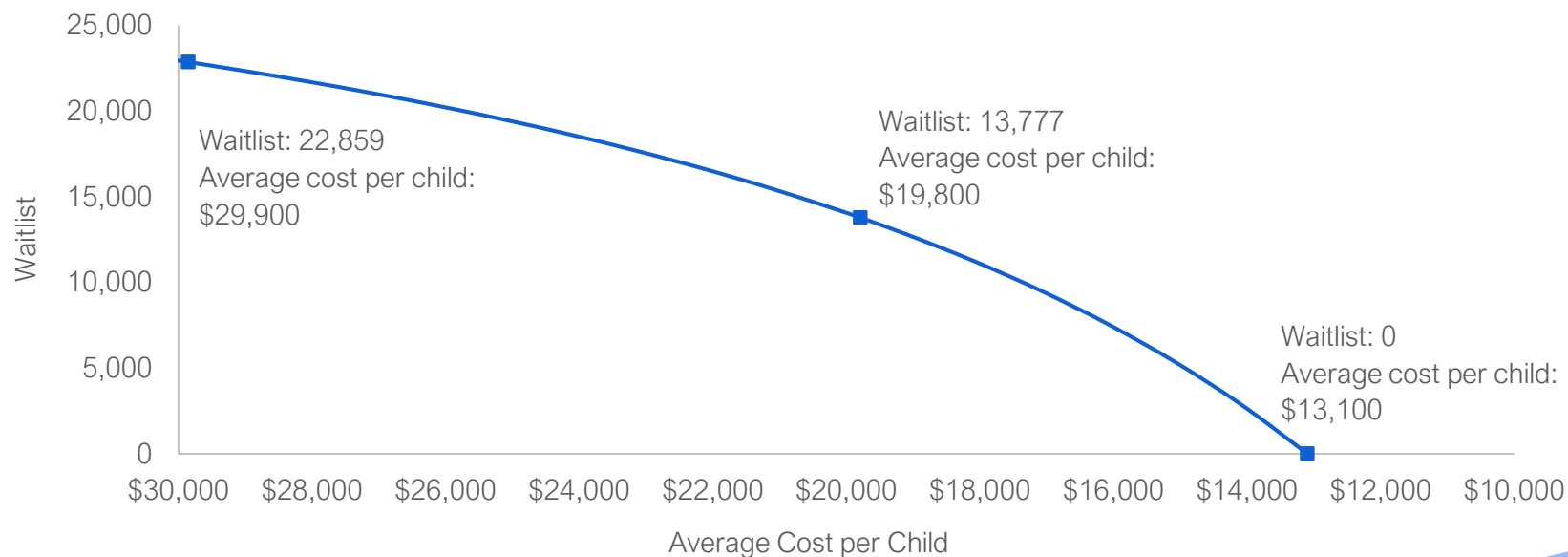


Note: Figures refer to the average number of clients in a given year. Projected figures for the new OAP are for 2021-22, which is assumed to be the first full year of implementation.

Source: FAO analysis of information provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.

Scenario 2: Fixed Budget and Lower Service Levels

- With a budget of \$600 million, lowering service levels would increase the number of children that receive support and reduce the waitlist.
 - To eliminate the waitlist, the average cost per client would need to be reduced to \$13,100, a 56 per cent reduction from 2019 OAP service levels.
 - If the new OAP were to provide service levels similar to the IBI/ABA programs prior to 2017, which averaged \$19,800 per client, then the waitlist would be 13,800 children.

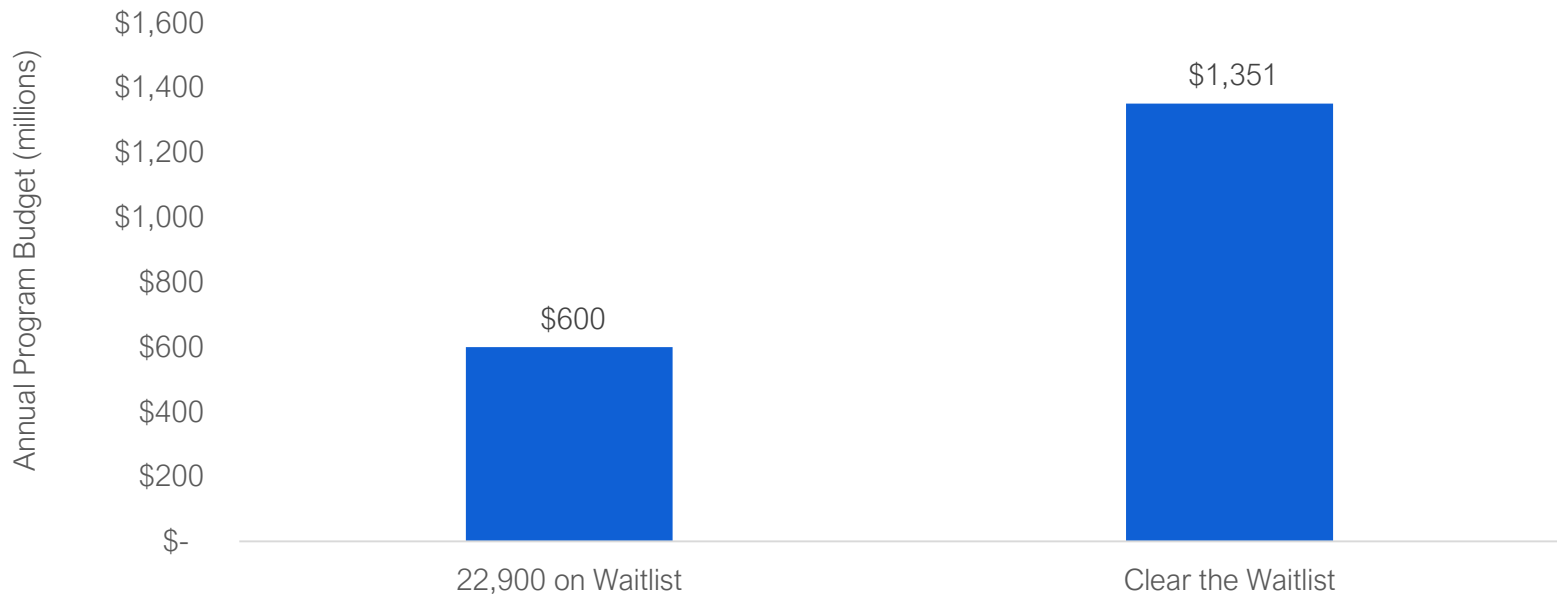


Note: Average cost per child of \$29,900 represents the 2019 OAP service levels, \$19,800 represents the pre-OAP programs (IBI/ABA), and \$13,100 represents the required average expense to eliminate the waitlist.

Source: FAO analysis.

Scenario 3: Increased Budget and 2019 OAP Service Level

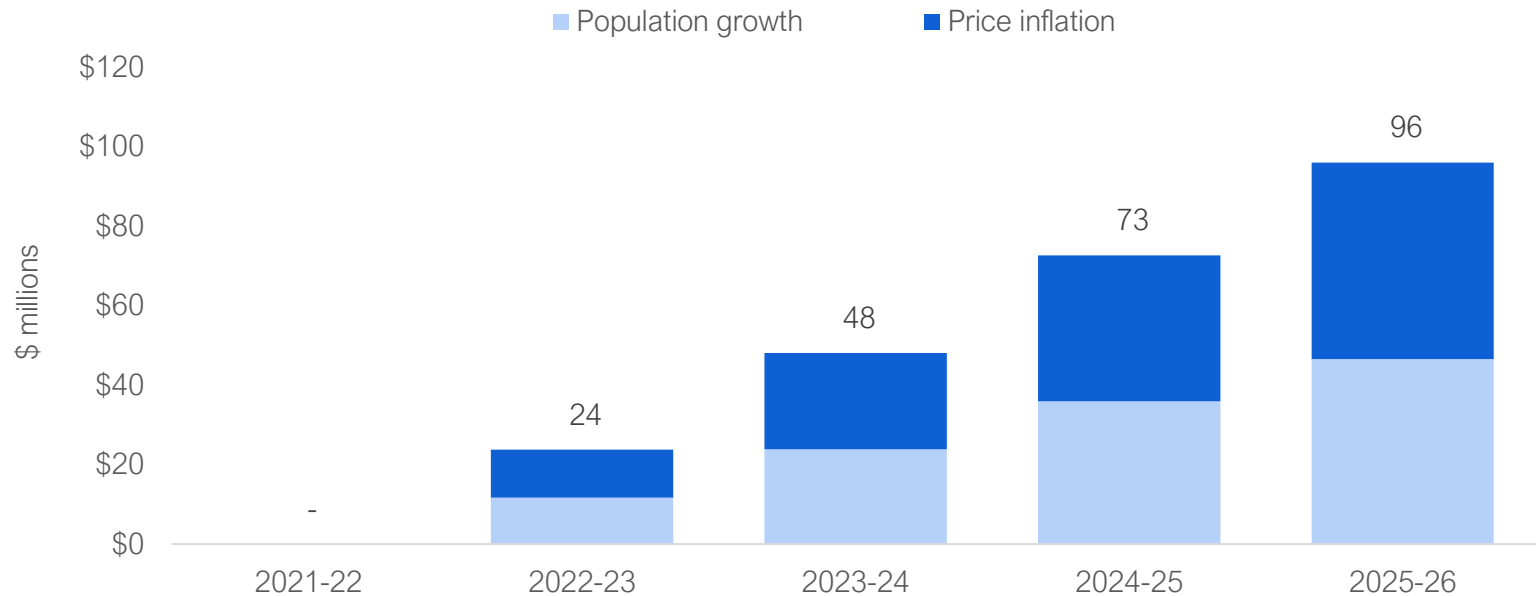
- With 2019 OAP average service levels (\$29,900 per client), to eliminate the waitlist entirely the budget for the new OAP would reach \$1.4 billion.
 - 40,700 children and youth would receive needs-based services averaging \$29,900 per child.



Source: FAO analysis.

Other Considerations: Cost Pressures

- The new OAP will face demographic and price pressures going forward.
- To ensure the waitlist does not increase and to maintain service levels, the new OAP's annual budget would need to increase from \$600 million to \$696 million by 2025-26.



Source: FAO analysis.

Other Considerations: Staff Availability

- Successful implementation of the new OAP will require a sufficient availability of qualified behavioural clinicians, speech language pathologists and occupational therapists to provide needs-based services.
- In response to a question from the FAO, the Province noted that limited information was available on the autism services labour market and that the ministry was in the process of collecting information to confirm the availability of qualified clinicians needed to meet demand under the new OAP.



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