What Is SSAH? A Funding Program Many Ontario Families of Children with Special Needs May Overlook

NorthStar Funding & Benefits Guide

Special Services at Home (SSAH) is a program that many Ontario families of children with special needs should understand. Unlike the Ontario Autism Program (OAP), it is not limited to autism. It serves eligible children with developmental and/or physical disabilities.

1. What Is the Purpose of SSAH

SSAH helps families purchase services and supports so that a child can:

- Participate in everyday activities
- Take part in activities that support growth and development
- Participate more fully at home and in the community
- Receive support that also provides some respite for the primary caregiver

The program is intended to supplement other services a child may already receive, including clinical services. It is not simply a duplicate of other programs.

2. Basic Eligibility

According to Ontario's official information, a child will generally need to:

- Require more support than children of the same age would ordinarily require because of a physical and/or developmental disability
- Live in Ontario and be legally entitled to reside in Canada
- Be under 18 years of age
- Live with a primary caregiver, or live separately without other government-funded out-of-home residential support

The application must also describe the functional limitations associated with the disability and include the required professional documentation.

3. Who Can Provide Documentation of Functional Limitations

The regulated health professionals listed officially include a range of practitioners, such as physicians, psychologists, nurse practitioners, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, psychotherapists, and behaviour analysts.

The focus is still not the diagnostic label itself. It is the additional support the child needs in everyday life because of the disability.

4. How Can SSAH Help a Family

Depending on the approved arrangement, a family may use SSAH to purchase eligible supports that help a child participate in everyday life, grow and develop, take part in community activities, and provide respite for caregivers.

SSAH is a funding and reimbursement program with specific rules. Whether a particular activity or expense is admissible must be confirmed according to the current program requirements and the terms of the family's approval.

NorthStar especially reminds parents not to assume that an activity is automatically reimbursable simply because it appears helpful for the child.

5. How to Describe the Need Clearly in an Application

Parents can focus on real-life situations, including:

- How much additional supervision the child needs compared with peers of the same age
- Support needed with self-care, communication, social interaction, safety, emotional regulation, or behaviour
- The one-to-one assistance the child needs to participate in community activities
- The family's caregiving pressure and need for respite
- The specific developmental goals the child hopes to achieve through the support

6. How Is SSAH Different from the OAP

The simplest way to understand the difference is:

> *The OAP is Ontario's service system specifically for autism.*
> *SSAH covers a broader group of children with developmental and/or physical disabilities and emphasizes everyday participation, growth and development, and caregiver support.*

Eligible families may need to understand and coordinate more than one program.

Important Notice: SSAH is a discretionary program, and funding depends on available program resources. Eligible expenses, reimbursement deadlines, and program rules may change. Follow the latest information from Ontario.ca and the approval documents provided to your family.