

Easter Seals Ontario Centennial

BACKGROUND

Why and How Easter Seals Started

The formation of Easter Seals Ontario can be traced back to November 28, 1922, when 10 representatives from seven Rotary Clubs (Hamilton, Windsor, Kitchener, Chatham, Toronto, Stratford and London) met in Windsor, Ontario to discuss the inadequate resources and support available for the province's children with physical disabilities. Recognizing a need for action, they formed the Ontario Society for Crippled Children (now Easter Seals Ontario), inspired by the American organization of the same name, which had been recently created by Ohio businessman, Edgar Allen.

Allen, and Ohio businessman, recognized the need for specialized care for children with disabilities in the early 1920s. Having lost his son in a car accident, Mr. Allen felt better resources could help prevent the deaths of other children. With the help of his Rotary Club, he built a special facility where children could receive medical assessment and treatment, but to his surprise, he soon found it was seldom used.

He discovered parents kept their children with disabilities at home because of the large expenses involved in treatment. This inspired him, with the help of other Rotary Clubs in nearby communities, to create the Ohio Society for Crippled Children. They forged relationships with hospitals and people with disabilities to ensure vital services went to those who needed it, regardless of their finances. In Canada, this pioneering organization became what is now known as Easter Seals Ontario.

Forging the Way for Enhanced Care and Services

Easter Seals was the first organization to employ nurses to carry services into the home. In 1934, a fundraiser was launched resulting in the first full-time district nurse, Miss Gretta Ross. Her first posting was to London where an office was provided in the War Memorial Children's Hospital. During a devastating polio outbreak in 1937, many expenses fell on Easter Seals. At the request of the provincial Department of Health, Easter Seals employed six nurses temporarily for follow-up care. An office was provided in the polio hospital, where May McAdam of Easter Seals arranged transportation of children in and out of the hospital using service club volunteer drivers. After the epidemic, it became clear that Easter Seals had to expand its services and employ more nurses.

The Ontario Government turned to Easter Seals in 1937 for expert assistance following a devastating poliomyelitis (polio) outbreak. In the same year, Easter Seals opened the first Canadian camp for children with physical disabilities. Fifty-five percent of the children who attended the camp that summer had polio.

In a plan to bring health and happiness to more children with physical disabilities, Easter Seals opened the Ontario Crippled Children's Centre, now known as Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, on May 16, 1962. It was considered the most outstanding treatment centre for children with physical disabilities in the world.



In 2003, Easter Seals formed a partnership with McMaster University's CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research. Projects supported by Easter Seals grant include the development of a youth kit, and research on how to best assist parents whose children are waiting for therapy.

Fundraising & Namesake

The first Ontario mail fundraising campaign was sent out at Easter time. Included in the package were the decorative "seals" that would become our namesake. The campaign proved to be a resounding success. Later that year, March was dubbed March is Easter Seals Month and included the annual presentation of official 'seals' to the Prime Minister. March is Easter Seals Month is still recognized and celebrated to this day to bring awareness to the issues and challenges facing kids with physical disabilities and their families in today's world.

Today, the organization is funded entirely through the corporate and individual donations. Much of their fundraising is completed through in-person events and initiatives.

Awareness & Advocacy

Public awareness has always been an important goal for Easter Seals. During "Health Week" in 1931, Easter Seals launched a public information campaign for the universal pasteurization of milk to help prevent the spread of tuberculosis, a major threat to children.

In 1977, Easter Seals joined with other organizations in a public awareness campaign to encourage Ontario residents to sign consent forms for the donation of specific organs at time of death. Print advertising was also created, urging women who were about to become pregnant to be checked for immunity against rubella, and to caution against the use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco during pregnancy.

In 1982, Easter Seals was the first to create a public awareness and prevention campaign focused on bike safety and helmet use in Ontario

In 2002, Easter Seals sponsored a province-wide public awareness campaign targeted at women of childbearing years, communicating the importance of folic acid in preventing neural tube birth defects.

Today, Easter Seals continues to champion issues facing children with disabilities through public education and awareness initiatives, participating in government consultations and on provincial advisory committees, as well as presenting at conferences. Their staff have a wealth of knowledge in special education and lead a team of volunteers who participate on Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC) on school boards across the province to represent the needs of kids with physical disabilities. The organization has a dedicated website for its programs and services, Services.EasterSeals.org, where parents have access to a variety of information resources and links to other support services.

Accessible and Inclusive Camps

Easter Seals has provided fully accessible summer camping programs for children with physical disabilities since 1937. Through the generous support of Rotary Clubs, Easter Seals opened Blue Mountain Camp in Collingwood, the first Canadian camp for children with physical disabilities

Today, Easter Seals Ontario is a leader in providing specially adapted recreational programming. The organization owns and operates two fully accessible camp properties near Perth (Camp Merrywood) and London (Camp Woodeden). In 2020, Easter Seals launched its first remote camp program, Camp E-aster Seals, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, offering campers accessible, camp-style activities and a way to connect and interact with other kids during a time when they needed it the most.

Easter Seals camps offer children and youth with physical disabilities the chance to experience fun, friendship and inclusive activities in an environment tailored to their strengths and abilities.

Equipment Funding

Easter Seals assists families with the purchase of essential mobility and accessibility equipment that allows their children to live with greater independence, dignity, and freedom in their daily lives. This type of equipment is expensive and most children with physical disabilities need various equipment items and outgrow them as quickly as they outgrow clothing. Most parents cannot afford all the equipment their child needs.

In Ontario, only some equipment is covered by the government and most of these items are only covered for 75% of the cost; families are expected to cover the rest of the cost.

For many items there is no government funding, meaning families have to patch together funding from other sources. Many families have to come up with thousands of dollars to purchase the equipment their child needs.

Easter Seals Equipment Funding Program fills the gap between insurance coverage, government programs and private funding families receive.

Here are some examples of the costs of essential mobility and accessibility equipment:

- Power wheelchair \$15,000 - \$35,000
- Manual wheelchair \$5,000 - \$15,000
- Bath lift* \$2,300 - \$4,000
- Home ramp \$1,000 - \$8,000
- Porch lift \$4,500 - \$7,000
- Van lift \$3,000 - \$35,000
- Shower/Commode chair* \$1,500 - \$5,000
- Specialized car seat* \$950 - \$4,000
- Stander \$1,500 - \$10,000
- Ankle-foot Orthotics \$1,200 - \$4,000

- Walker \$ 500 - \$6,000

* Note: No government assistance is available for these items.

Scholarships - Furthering Education

Through their scholarship program, Easter Seals provides funding to assist youth with physical disabilities in achieving their dreams of post-secondary education. Through the generous support of donors, \$14,450 was awarded in post-secondary scholarships in 2020.

Ambassador Program – Developing Confidence & Leadership

Children and youth with physical disabilities deserve to be heard. The Easter Seals Ambassador Program offers kids the opportunity to build their self-confidence and develop their leadership and public speaking skills. Each year two individuals are selected to represent the organization as the Easter Seals Provincial Ambassadors. In addition, there are 90 Local Ambassadors representing children and youth in communities across the province.

COVID-19 Impact on Families of Children with a Disability

The pandemic has brought on a host of additional challenges for families with children with physical disabilities:

Many children with physical disabilities also have health problems and compromised immune systems, which means they are much more vulnerable to contracting the Coronavirus. As a result, parents must be vigilant and isolate their children and opportunities for socialization often remain reduced or eliminated for these families.

Children and youth with physical disabilities rely on physiotherapy and occupational therapy, and for months they had to go without these treatments. Even as communities have reopened, therapy continues to be very limited with few in-person sessions available. Without access to regular therapy, the child's development may regress, making the need for mobility and accessibility equipment even more urgent.

Many children with physical disabilities rely on personal care and other supports to be provided in the home. To minimize the risk, many parents were reluctant to let care workers in their home, and as a result are providing hands-on care, including vital therapy exercises, changing the child's position to prevent skin sores, and personal hygiene such as bathing and toileting. Parents have been providing this care while meeting their other responsibilities including caring for the rest of their family, and in many cases, continue to work. With no or limited respite options, many parents are suffering from exhaustion and are under tremendous stress.

The Next 100 Years

Throughout the past century, Easter Seals has survived and evolved through depression, war, peace, prosperity, economic recessions, and a global pandemic. The organization is more committed than ever to doing everything within our power to help remove barriers and create a more inclusive society so children and youth with physical disabilities can experience greater independence, freedom, and dignity.



As Easter Seals moves into its next 100 years, they remain committed to championing the issues and needs of kids with physical disabilities. By continuing to provide life-changing programs and services, they are nurturing the voices of the kids they serve. With a goal of helping all children and youth with physical disabilities to be truly heard, Easter Seals continues to lead the way to a more inclusive society where all kids can achieve their dreams.