



**Hands • Mains**

[TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca](http://TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca)

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**2025– 2029**

Strategic Plan

# EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESSIBILITY



Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca is committed to advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) across all the work we do to foster an empowering, respectful, and safe environment for all community members, staff, and volunteers.

We recognize the unique needs of equity-deserving groups and is dedicated to providing equitable access to programs and services that meet the needs of diverse and ever-growing communities throughout the regions we serve.

Hands TheFamilyHelpNetork.ca embraces EDIA and actively applies best practices to create meaningful, lasting change in our care environments.

We are committed to cultivating a fair, inclusive workplace culture and building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

**We are working together to create a better day, today and tomorrow. This means breaking down barriers to accessing care and creating an organization where everyone can meet their individual health and wellness goals.**

# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE



Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca provides a diverse range of compassionate and professional services. Services for clients across the lifespan, from children and youth to adults. Services for a wide range of needs in the areas of mental health, neurodivergence, and developmental well-being. Services tailored to the individual needs of our clients from intensive treatment, to school support, to system navigation.

We are also a leader in our communities throughout the north. We serve as a Lead Agency for child and youth mental health services in Nipissing and Muskoka-Parry Sound. We are the provider for the northeast region's passport reimbursement services. We are the information management leads for the Developmental Services Consolidated Information System for the entire province. We offer autism services from Bracebridge to James Bay.

As we embark on a new strategic plan, I am grateful to the many clients and families who have engaged with our services, and proud of the staff who support them through our daily operations. We are also acutely aware of the challenges and risks that face our sector, and the opportunity to grow therein.

This plan is meant to ensure that those needs continue to be addressed, well into the future. As clients and partners are presented with more options, we strive to continue to be the sustainable top choice agency for clients, staff, partners, and funders.



**Andrea Roberts**  
Chief Executive Officer

Through my five years on the board of directors at Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca, and three as Chair, I have witnessed our staff live our agency values: innovation, compassion, accountability, respect, integrity, and quality.

I have seen the impact our staff have on clients, of all ages, presenting with a diverse array of needs. Through thoughtful and strategic governance, we have supported the agency as a leader in our communities.

Our staff are consistently faced with the challenge of offering more and better services for individuals with increasingly complex needs. Staff pursue these improvements to services, and dedication to our clients, while being asked to adapt and change to evolving health and social services models.

The resilience of staff and dedication to clients in the face of seemingly daunting challenges, and frequent disruptions, has been inspiring. This plan outlines how as an agency we will not only navigate an unpredictable future but grow and transform.

I, and our entire board, endorse this plan and the approach laid out to navigating the unprecedented challenges facing this agency.

We will not lose sight of our core services. We will embrace risks as opportunities to grow and transform, in service of our clients, staff, partners, and funders.



**Dawn Lagesten**  
President, Board of Directors


# WHO WE SERVE

Across the province the prevalence of mental health, neurodivergent, and developmental needs are rising. Unfortunately, many of these individuals are still not receiving the services they need.

## Child and Youth Mental Health

 **1 OF 5 CHILDREN** in Ontario will experience some form of mental health problem (1)


 **83% OF THESE CHILDREN** will not receive the treatment they need (1)

 Physician visits among children and youth for mental health related concerns have risen and they are being prescribed increasing amounts of medication (2)

## Child and Youth Development

 **25% OF CHILDREN** across Canada experienced difficulties in at least one area of development prior to beginning grade one (3)

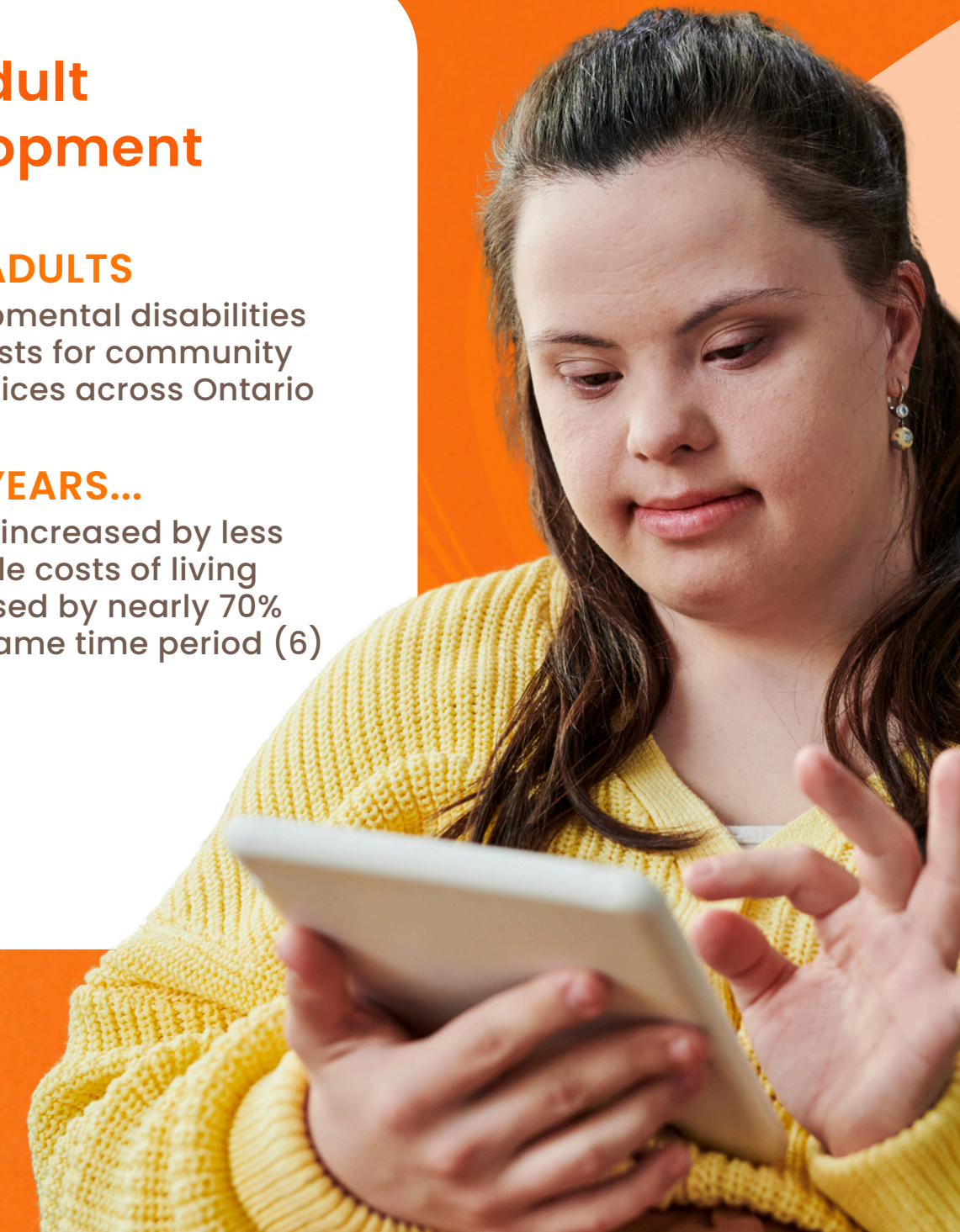
 **1 OF 50 CHILDREN** across Canada were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and are more likely to have increased general health, mental health, and education needs (5)

 Developmental risks in childhood are significant predictors of health and well-being later in life (4)

## Adult Development

 **42,000+ ADULTS** with developmental disabilities are on waitlists for community support services across Ontario

 **OVER 30 YEARS...** funding has increased by less than 7%, while costs of living have increased by nearly 70% during the same time period (6)



# EFFECTS OF CARE

When access to care is possible, the impact ripples outward. The right support at the right time leads to better outcomes—not just for individuals, but for families, caregivers, and communities as a whole.

What happens when individuals do receive the care they need?



**CLIENTS**

Clients have improved well-being, life satisfaction, and engagement in their communities



**CAREGIVERS**

Caregivers experience reduced stress and financial burdens



**COMMUNITIES**

Community programs reduce hospitalizations, and support community engagement and safety efforts



# THE HANDS STORY

For over four decades, we have supported individuals, families, and communities on their journey toward mental health, neurodivergence, and developmental well-being. Our legacy of care is rooted in a deep understanding of the diverse needs and challenges faced by each client at every stage of life.

What truly distinguishes us is our unwavering commitment to personalized client care. Our experienced multidisciplinary team of professionals collaborates with you to craft tailored solutions that address your unique circumstances, preferences, and goals. From infancy to adulthood, we're here to provide the integrated support and guidance you need to thrive.

At Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca, we place great emphasis on evidence-based practices, ensuring that every intervention and treatment is grounded in the latest research and clinical expertise. This commitment to excellence means that you can trust in the effectiveness and safety of the care you receive from us.

Put your trust in our Hands on your wellness journey and experience the difference that compassionate, individualized care can make in transforming your life, and your communities, for better days today, and tomorrow.



**3 ministry funders**



**800,000 square km catchment area**



**11 offices across our district**



**Over 200 compassionate and professional staff**



**Support for over 10,000 clients annually**

## OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS...



**9000 +**

Child and youth mental health cases supported through our lead agency role—over 4,000 of which received direct services from Hands.



**50% Growth**

In autism services, we've grown from supporting 800 families to more than 1,300.



**2500+**

We support over 2500 adult individuals every year through the Passport program for developmental services across the Northeast.



# CORE VALUES

## Integrity

We believe in doing right by our clients and everyone we work with by aligning our actions, interactions and decisions with honesty, ethics and professionalism.

## Compassion

We believe that kindness and understanding are key to fostering optimal growth and must be demonstrated everyday through empathy, patience and genuine care.

## Accountability

We believe that better outcomes are the result of commitment, trust and quality partnerships that are grounded in our individual and collective responsibility.

## Respect

We believe in the dignity and worth of all people and commit to listen, validate, and affirm the unique experiences of our clients, our people, and our partners.

## Innovation

We believe in the power of possibility, and that in service of our clients, we must pursue intentional steps towards transformative offerings and ways of doing business.

## Quality

We believe that evidence-based practice and the pursuit of continuous improvement are essential to maintain the highest standards for excellent service and exceptional care.

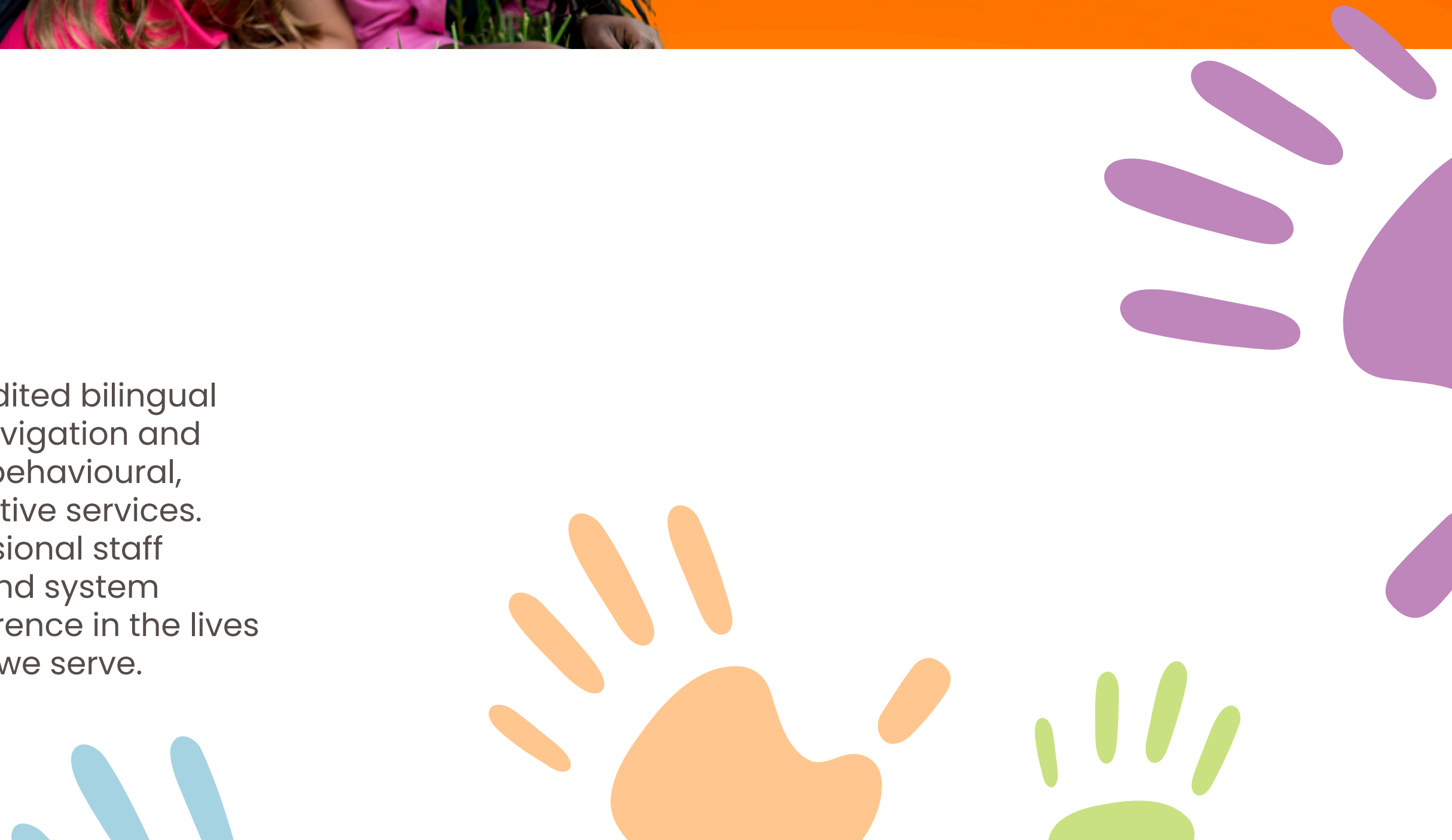


# VISION

Working together to create a better day today and tomorrow.

# MISSION

Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca is an accredited bilingual organization that provides quality clinical, navigation and professional support in the areas of autism, behavioural, developmental, mental health and rehabilitative services. Our experienced, knowledgeable and professional staff provide equitable client-informed services and system leadership designed to make a positive difference in the lives of the individuals, families and communities we serve.



# THE HANDS WAY

We created “the Hands way” to guide how we deliver the services and supports our clients need.



We believe in empowering our staff, partners and clients to achieve the outcomes they want most.



We promote and encourage healthy choices and approaches in all we do.



We collaborate with curiosity and purpose to deliver better outcomes through innovation and partnership.



We are committed to focusing on our clients' needs.



We actively live our HANDS values: Integrity, Compassion, Accountability, Respect, Innovation, and Quality.

# HARNESSING DISRUPTION

The sectors in which we operate are dynamic environments. There are a number of factors influencing the way mental health, autism, and developmental disability supports are offered in our province. Now more than ever, there is an increasing emphasis on choice, client experience, and accountability.



## Ontario Autism Program

Since the shift to direct funding in 2019, Hands has continued to evolve its services to meet the increasingly complex and individualized needs of families, balancing foundational offerings with flexible, client-driven supports.

## Journey to Belonging Initiative

Drawing on our experience with the Ontario Autism Program, Hands is proactively preparing for a shift toward client-directed funding in adult developmental services—positioning ourselves to remain a trusted, preferred provider in an increasingly choice-driven system.

## CYMH Sector Review

With major system changes on the horizon, Hands is closely monitoring the Auditor General's recommendations and preparing to align with a more coordinated, accessible, and outcomes-driven approach to child and youth mental health services across Ontario.



In 2019 the Ontario government reformed the way Autism services are provided across the province (7). Specifically, changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) involved allocating funding directly to families to purchase services that best met their needs, as opposed to directly funding service providers to offer a range of services. This shift was incredibly impactful on clients, caregivers, and professionals working in the field, and resulted in passionate public discourse.

## Resulting Shift in Operations

For agencies like Hands, providing funds directly to clients and families resulted in a significant shift in operations.

1. It eliminated set operating budgets, and significantly reduced the predictability of financial parameters.
2. It demanded that service providers responded to the unique needs and preferences of clients and families eligible for direct funding options. If an agency was not providing the supports desired, clients were more likely to pursue services elsewhere, and take their funding dollars with them.

## Navigating Client Needs

We continue to navigate the needs of our clients while balancing the new expectations in how we provide services. These needs are becoming increasingly more complicated with co-occurring mental health, long-term health conditions, and difficulties in school more likely to be present in children and youth diagnosed with autism (3). We continue to adapt our client offerings, balancing foundational services available for all Ontario Autism Program families, alongside paid services that are selected based upon individual client needs and preferences.



The Ontario government has also conducted a similar review of adult developmental services, with the expectation that clients needing those services will be provided a similar degree of autonomy and choice through the Journey to Belonging Initiative (8).

## Resulting Shift in Operations

This initiative includes guiding principles that resemble the changes in the Ontario Autism Program, emphasizing a shift towards a needs based funding approach that would include clients managing their individual funding directly. This proposed shift is likely to result in similar disruptions to operations, potentially eliminating base funding and allowing clients to pursue services elsewhere.

## Navigating Changes

Our experience navigating changes in the Ontario Autism Program, combined with our existing regional supports for developmental services in the north east, allows us to anticipate the impact of the proposed changes in the developmental services sector. This foresight has prompted us to proactively pursue adjustments before such changes are explicitly mandated. We are determined to remain the top choice of clients, even as their options increase.





Changes are likely coming to the child and youth mental health (CYMH) sector as well. The Performance Audit Community-Based Child and Youth Mental Health Program (9), an independent auditor's report from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario released in April, 2025, was undertaken to understand significant disruptions within the sector, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the transfer of program accountability and oversight from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to the Ministry of Health (9).

## Performance Audit Recommendations

The report outlines 22 different recommendations to the Ministry of Health for changes in the provision of child and youth mental health services in Ontario (9). Some recommendations include:

- Improving accessibility of intensive CYMH services as many communities throughout Ontario do not have access to this level of care
- The adoption of coordinated access to CYMH services, in order to streamline client experiences and reduce wait times
- The creation of communities of practice or centre's of excellence that will establish CYMH specific quality standards and corresponding outcome monitoring, in order to ensure that the services provided to youth throughout the province are consistent and performing at the highest possible levels

These changes represent a much-needed fundamental shift to the way services are provided across the province, but will undoubtedly result in significant disruptions to clients and care providers as they are implemented.

## Navigating Changes

Our agency's commitment to excellence in service through evidence-based, data driven, measured outcomes aligns with recommendations from the report calling for the improvement of data collection, reporting, and adherence to quality standards. By proactively addressing these needs, our agency will be positioned as a leader when inevitable changes to mandates arrive from ministry sources. Hands plays a unique role in responding to these recommendations in our role as a Lead Agency. Not only do we have responsibilities to our clients, and communities, but also to several partner agencies within the designated service area.

## Financial Risks

The Performance Audit of Community-Based Child and Youth Mental Health Programs also highlights financial risks within the sector (9). Salaries in the child and youth mental health sector are consistently lower than those in school and acute care services (9, 10). This contributes to high turnover rates, and significant recruitment challenges. This issue is further compounded as funding amounts for core service providers have not been adjusted in decades (9). In 2023 there was an increase to base funding for community CYMH programs, but it was a mere 5% (10). Wages in the CYMH sector remain anywhere from 20% to even 50% lower than comparable roles in education settings or hospitals.



In response to shifting funding landscapes and ongoing sector disruptions, we are focused on building long-term sustainability through diversified revenue streams and adaptive strategies that align with our mission, vision, and evolving client needs.

## Diversifying Funding

Ministry funding is a driving factor for our strategic objective to diversify funding. However, not for profits across multiple sectors in Canada are experiencing a greater need for additional sources of revenue (11). This need, combined with affordability concerns amongst donors (11), means we will need to pursue innovative partnerships and grants to supplement combined ministry funding and philanthropy sources.

## Navigating Changes as an Agency

While change is certain across our sectors, the specifics of these changes remain unclear. We intend to navigate these changes in a way that positions us as the sustainable top choice for our clients, staff, partners, and funders in alignment with our vision and mission. The remainder of this strategic plan outlines our strategic goal, objectives, and outlines the implementation plan for our strategic initiatives





THE TOP CHOICE AGENCY

# OUR STRATEGIC GOAL

Our overarching goal is to be **the sustainable top choice agency** for clients, staff, partners, and funders.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



At the heart of our agency, in service of our vision and mission, and in response to disruptions in our sectors, we have embraced three driving strategic objectives.

These objectives are interdependent. Success in one demands success in the others. It is why we have migrated away from strategic pillars, to a helix of synergistic strategic objectives that will help us become the top choice agency for clients, staff, partners, and funders.

We will demonstrate our commitment to keeping clients and community service as the foundation for all we do by providing evidence-based services, data informed decisions and measuring outcomes.



We seek diversified funds to be able to fill funding gaps (now and forthcoming) to reinvest and support changing and growing client needs.

We aim to be a sustainable and collaborative agency strengthening our people, partnerships, and processes.

**By pursuing these objectives, we believe we will not only deliver on our vision and mission, but successfully navigate the disruptions that are challenging our sectors.**

# STRATEGIC ENABLERS

In order to accomplish our strategic objectives, we have amassed a collection of strategic enablers: tools, conditions, and capabilities that will help us achieve our strategic goals. Our agency will continue to grow our capacity in strategic execution, and adopt the right tools for the right context in pursuit of our strategic objectives.

## Strategic Horizons

Frame innovation in a way that does not undermine the core services that our clients and partners know and trust, while encouraging growth.

## Product Management

Adopting the best practices from adjacent industries to ensure our services remain competitive and impactful.



## Integrated Risk Management

Identification of risks, to identify both threats and opportunities, and develop responsive plans.

## Design Thinking

Ensuring that the client remains at the heart of our processes.

## Decision Making Frameworks

Understand the criteria and processes to make difficult decisions in a dynamic and uncertain environment.



## Right People, Right Roles

Ensure all key functions across Finance, Human Resources, and Strategy Innovation and Systems, are properly resourced



## Recruitment Optimizations

Review and document workflow from the time a position is open to three months probation and create operational improvements by removing unnecessary steps, changing the order of steps, and applying other process improvement tactics on remaining steps



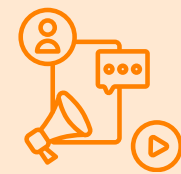
## Client Experience

Map out the client journey and provide recommendations for growth and improvement



## Fund Development

Develop and implement a fund development plan that includes a \$2M pipeline with a 40% success rate



## Brand Strategy

Develop a brand strategy and implement it to begin guiding the marketing and communications work of the agency



## Product Development

Establish a product development and management practice to organize our approach to paid services ensuring thoughtful evaluation, planning, release, and strategic management of products considering market need, internal prioritization and capacity, and sustainability to ensure success



## Financial Framework

Develop a Strategic Financial Framework that: Defines a financial vision; Establishes financial guardrails; Utilizes forecasting and scenario planning; Engages cross-functional stakeholders; Communicates and operationalizes the strategy; and Builds in monitoring and adjustment mechanisms.



## Data Strategy

Map all current data collection, accessibility, processing and storage activities; Provide recommendations for the agency to grow our practices and become a leader in data collection and reporting; Develop a foundational data architecture/warehouse for ongoing reporting infrastructure



# LOOKING FORWARD

We don't know what the future will look like for our sector...

**What we do know, is that Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca will be there.**

As a sustainable, collaborative organization, we will continue to be a foothold in our community for clients and families. Our future financial statements will reflect a reduction in reliance on ministry funded sources, leveraging a combination of grants, paid services, and philanthropy in order to reinvest in our organization. We will remain committed to offering excellence in service, expanding our activities to innovatively support our clients with new offerings, and where necessary, transforming the way we operate in order to navigate the risks inherent in our sector. We will transform these risks into opportunities so that our client stories, and increasingly our measured outcomes, will reflect that people are getting what they need.



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## We can't do it alone.

At Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca, we respect and value diverse engagement from clients, families, partners, and funders. If you, or someone you know needs support with child and youth mental health, or child and adult neurodivergent needs, please visit our website for more information and to get support from our network of services.



### JOIN OUR TEAM

If you would like to join our team, visit our Careers Page at <https://thefamilyhelpnetwork.ca/about-us/careers/> to learn more about what opportunities are available



### MAKE A DONATION

If you would like to contribute financially to our agency and support investment in our services, visit <https://thefamilyhelpnetwork.ca/services/donate/>



### BECOME A BOARD MEMBER

If you would like to donate your time and contribute to our vision, mission, and values, consider becoming a board member, learn more at <https://thefamilyhelpnetwork.ca/services/board-of-directors-opportunities/>

If you would like to show your support in other ways, consider following us on social at @handstfhn. See our social media profiles below where you can stay informed services, career opportunities, and the impact of our work.



**Thank you for supporting Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca.**



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- (6) OASIS, Community Living Ontario. (2025) Election Engagement Toolkit.
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- (11) The Giving Report. (2023) Canada Helps.