



City of  
**Peterborough**

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**TO:** Members of the Joint Services Steering Committee

**FROM:** Ken Doherty, Director of Community Services

**MEETING DATE:** June 13, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Report CSSSJSSC13-006  
Social Assistance Reform

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## **PURPOSE**

A report to provide information on the future of Social Assistance Programs in Ontario.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Joint Services Steering Committee endorse the recommendation outlined in Report CSSSJSSC13-006, dated June 13, 2013, of the Director of Community Services as follows:

That the report and presentation on Social Assistance Reform be received for information.

## **BUDGET AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no budget and financial implications in receiving this report.

## BACKGROUND

In 2008, the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy recommended that Social Assistance in this Province move away from an overly complex, regulatory burdened system that falls far short from meeting recipient's basic needs and moving them out of poverty and into the labour market.

In January 2010, Premier Dalton McGuinty appointed Francis Lankin and Munir Sheikh as Commissioners to undertake a review of Ontario's Social Assistance Program. They were tasked with developing a vision and approach for a new system that would efficiently and effectively meet the twin objectives of providing employment supports and financial supports. On October 24, 2012, the Commission released its final report called **Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario**.

### Summary of the final paper

The final Commission report contains 108 recommendations including proposing ways to:

- enhance the opportunity for people with disabilities to become employed
- consolidate the delivery of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works through municipalities
- simplify the social assistance benefits structure to reduce rules and administrative costs;
- establish rates that balances adequacy, fairness and incentives to work; and
- improve incentives for employment and "making work pay".

The commission recommended that in the longer term the province should examine ways to make prescription drugs, dental and other health benefits available to all low-income Ontarians. The executive summary of the report is attached as Appendix A and an electronic version of the full report can be found on line at:

**[http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/uploads/File/COMM\\_Report\\_FinalH-t-Eng.pdf](http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/uploads/File/COMM_Report_FinalH-t-Eng.pdf)**

### Provincial Response

The report only provided recommendations to the government. Since the report's release there has been high level comment on the need for social assistance reform but a clear action plan or timetable for implementation has not yet been developed.

Premier Kathleen Wynne tabled the Liberal's budget on May 2, 2013; it included a number of proposed actions related to social assistance:

- A rate increase of 1% beginning and an additional \$14 per month top up for Ontario Works adults without children;
- Increased earning exemption of \$200 per month;
- Increased asset levels for Ontario Works recipients from \$606 to \$2,500 for adults and from \$1,043 to \$5,000 for couples; and
- Simplifying asset rules that includes removing the restriction on the value of a primary vehicle and permitting gifts of up to \$6,000.

The New Democratic and the Conservative Parties have also indicated the need for some form of reform of social assistance. Whether the Liberal budget passes and/or the current government remains in power, Social Assistance reform in some form is likely to be embarked on over the next few years.

### **AMO/OMSSA positions**

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario together with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and the City of Toronto have provided input to the Assistant Deputy Minister of Ministry of Community and Social Services, David Carter Whitney. A copy of this response is attached as Appendix B. Key messages contained within the AMO/OMSSA/City of Toronto response are listed below:

- There is a shared provincial and municipal interest in Social Assistance Reform.
- Given the significant role municipalities have in local integrated systems planning and economic and labour market development, social assistance reform requires a process includes municipalities as partners at the table to determine arrangements that make sense across the province will be key.
- Given the range and complexity of the recommendations, it is difficult to look at any one recommendation in isolation of other potential changes.
- Change should come with no surprises to whoever delivers the program.

### **Local response to Social Assistance Response**

Since the release of the final report in 2012, the Social Services Division has been engaged in review of the report and local dialogue. Staff co-hosted meetings with the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network (PPRN) in December and February to provide an overview of the recommendations and to hear initial reaction to the report from community service providers.

The Income Security Working group of PPRN hosted a community event to provide information and receive input from people with lived experience on March 27, 2013. The written report summarizing the position is attached as Appendix C. Many service providers and attendees at the PPRN community meeting stressed the importance of Social Assistance Reform occurring in a way that de-stigmatizes being on assistance, and living in poverty becomes a main stream issue was expressed. The importance of engaging low income and social assistance recipients in the conversation around implementation of a new system has been strongly stated.

### **Alignment to Social Services Division Priorities**

Much of what is contained in the report aligns well with the broad strategic directions of the Social Services Division plan for 2013 and 2014

#### **a) Alignment to OW Service Plan Report CSSSJSSC13-007.**

The Social Services Service Plan “People Serving People” focuses on addressing poverty for priority populations. The division continues to focus on addressing poverty and sees social assistance reform as one way to move towards that goal. The division is also focused on improving partnerships with employers and economic development. Job fairs, local labour market analysis and strong relationships with employers and economic development agencies will help the division support clients to independence through employment where ever possible.

The division’s service plan also aligns with the “Brighter Prospects Report” as it relates to improving customer service and accountability. In this planning cycle new process improvement strategies are being undertaken. Using LEAN methods waste is being minimized and customer service is being maximized. The division has also taken significant steps to increase accountability by focusing on achieving outcomes and reporting on both our successes and shortcomings. Integrated service delivery in rural areas and with referrals to Employment Ontario providers is already showing benefits for our clients.

#### **b) Plans for a local ODSP/OW Employment pilot**

While the government considers options related to the reform of the complex social assistance system, there is the opportunity using existing resources to test improvements to service delivery to improve employment outcomes for people on ODSP. Lessons learned through this kind of carefully planned and implemented local pilot projects will help to inform the government on the best path forward.

Representatives from the Peterborough community, municipal and provincial staff and local funded service providers will undertake the development of the voluntary employment focused pilot project. Participation in development of the pilot from the following groups will be sought to ensure a broad base of perspectives and input is considered:

- Local ODSP office
- City Social Services Division Ontario Works (OW) program
- ODSP Employment Service providers (CMHA, Community Living, Alternatives, CNIB, Canadian Hearing Society, Northern Lights)
- MCSS Regional Office and Policy Branch
- Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network
- People with lived experience
- Employment Ontario (EO) service providers
- Employer Champions as identified by the Council for Persons with Disabilities

The project would include a number of key elements to meet the employment and training needs of disabled individuals such as:

- Effective coordination and access for people on ODSP to the broad range of employment and training services available in the community including ODSP, OW and EO.
- Employment interventions based on participant suitability rather than rigid eligibility requirements.
- Use of facilitated employment information sessions and peer navigators so that ODSP recipients have the necessary supports and access to accurate information regarding existing programs, services and legislation.
- Improved employer engagement to support recruitment in partnership with Council for Persons with Disabilities and GPAEDC.

**c) Links to the Broader Employment Service System Transformation**

Provincial direction, including the Drummond report, has pointed to the need for improved integration between the Employment Services Programs and Social Assistance Programs. The Social Services Division has been recognized as a leader in service integration, for its innovation and municipal best practices in reducing program duplication. Staff will continue to ensure local residents are connected with the right services and to assist local employers with recruitment needs through vacancy advertising, screening of resumes, job matching and post-employment supports and have been successful in helping Ontario Works clients off assistance and other individuals in avoiding the need for assistance.

## Next Steps

There are plans for further community dialogue including a forum jointly hosted by the PPRN and Social Services on June 25, 2013. The working group developing an OW/ODSP pilot will commence in early June. Staff will continue to monitor provincial activity on the topic of Social Assistance reform and provide input where possible.

## SUMMARY

The Commission's final report provides a comprehensive framework for major changes needed to transform social assistance in Ontario. There are many points of alignment with the 2013-2014 Service Plan including the emphasis on partnerships with employers and stakeholder engagement as part of continuous improvement. Any changes to the social assistance system should be well planned and in a full partnership with all relevant stakeholders. Peterborough is well positioned as a service delivery system and in the broader community to align with change as required. Staff will continue to monitor the Province's direction on this matter and provide updates as appropriate.

Submitted by,

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Attachments:

Appendix A - Executive Summary

Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario

Appendix B – AMO Position Paper

Appendix C – PPRN Summary Report