

Recovery and Renewal – Ontario’s Vision for Social Assistance Transformation

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Report Summary

This report provides information to introduce the new vision and transformational direction that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced regarding social assistance recovery and renewal. The Government of Ontario is embarking on designing a new service delivery model that includes modernization and transformation of human services delivery.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy & Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

The Provincial government announcement, detailed in the report, will have an impact on operational funding in the Children and Social Services Division. While the impact is not yet known, this change will have an effect on the current funding model.

Executive Summary

The Government of Ontario has developed a new vision for social assistance programs that involves modernization and transformation of human services delivery.

This report provides an overview and key highlights of the province’s new vision for social assistance. The province will be working with municipalities over the next year to co-design a modernized and sustainable social assistance system that connects people to the supports they need and helps move them towards employment and independence.

Background

On February 11, 2021, Ontario's Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, Todd Smith announced the release of the Province's Vision for Social Assistance transformation. The renewed program emphasizes the creation of an efficient, effective, and streamlined social services system that is people-centered, providing clients with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success.

The announcement came as part of Ontario's Recovery and Renewal Plan. Consultations with various stakeholder groups and municipal partners is already underway. The Province currently shares the cost of the provision and delivery of Ontario Works services with municipalities

Key Highlights

Recent social assistance reviews have shown that the current system has always faced several challenges like inflexible paper dependent processes and is more focused on enforcement and technical aspects than actually helping individuals in need. These challenges were further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The key principles outlined in the new vision include:

- prioritizing the outcomes of employment, financial resilience, independence, and well-being
- supporting positive client and staff experiences
- assigning roles to where they make the most sense and improve efficiency which includes the provincial centralization of some functions
- improving program integrity by leveraging data and technology
- co-design in partnership with municipal delivery partners
- building a system that puts people at the center, with services that work effectively together to support them
- using data, evidence, and the voice of clients to inform design

The new transformation process intends to streamline and provide an integrated client and human service and delivery in phases:

- Phase One Model (2020 - 2022): Realigning Provincial and Municipal Functions.
- Phase Two Model (2022 - 2024): Decentralizing Delivery System where municipalities deliver life stabilization for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients.
- Human Services Model (2024 - beyond): Providing Human Services (by broadening access to caseworkers) through centralized provincial delivery and flexible human services delivery. Municipalities will provide integrated life stabilization supports to social assistance clients, people in crisis and early intervention, and prevention programs before clients need access to the Social Assistance system.

Local Impacts

As previously reported to the Community Services Committee, the Province had embarked on system modernization several years ago and has slowly been implementing changes. The change with the biggest impact thus far has been the restructuring of employment services within municipalities that started in 2019 in several pilot sites across the province. This change is expected to occur in Greater Sudbury as early as 2022 and will have an impact on the employment funding that the City receives through the Ontario Works funding stream. This latest vision document takes these modernization changes even further with a faster implementation timeline and further consultation with delivery partners.

Other changes that have already started include the Children and Social Services Division's participation in the centralized intake pilot and preparation for electronic document management; expected in the fall of 2021.

Changes that involve the shifting of resources to these centralized services, such as intake and ongoing verification processes, are likely to have a negative impact on the current funding model. Conversely, it is expected that there will be recognition for the increased costs associated with new services that would be offered locally by caseworkers for ODSP clients. This is currently not a service level that is funded by the Province.

Next Steps

The province is taking a controlled and phased approach, which will be prototyped in different regions to allow for a smooth transition and avoid disruptions, with the aim of attaining substantial progress in all regions by 2024. Where needed, legislative and regulatory alterations will be made by the Province.

Consultation on program policy and design as well as roles and responsibilities will continue over the coming months between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, municipal partners, and other ministries. Regular updates will be provided to the Community Services Committee.

Resources Cited

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