

Background

On July 10, 2017, a report was presented to the Community Services Committee regarding the Social Services Discretionary Benefits Policy, increasing the budget for Discretionary Benefits by \$350,000 effective January 1, 2018.

<https://agendasonline.greatersudbury.ca/index.cfm?pg=agenda&action=navigator&id=1203&itemid=13497&lang=en>

The Community Services Committee further directed staff to return with a report that reviewed the current service level while balancing individual needs of the client based on the social determinants of health. This report outlines changes to service levels and updates the Discretionary Benefits Policy to meet individual client needs.

Service Standard

Following the review of the Discretionary Benefits Policy, it has been determined that all items funded through this benefit are required to support low-income families in meeting their health and housing needs.

The year-end deficit for the 2017 Discretionary Benefits Budget is projected to be approximately \$380,000. Therefore, adjustments to the policy are needed in order to balance the enhanced budget approved for 2018.

Based on a review of other Social Assistance offices in Ontario, Greater Sudbury provides greater benefits in many areas. Therefore, it is recommended that changes regarding frequency of some benefits will be decreased (Appendix 1 – Discretionary Rate Chart) to be parallel with province wide standards. It is expected that changes to frequencies for appliances and beds will not have an adverse effect on clients if Social Services have discretion to issue the benefit earlier based on individual needs. An example of early issuance for a bed or appliance would be due to an exceptional circumstance such as a flood or fire.

As discussed in the July report with the Community Services Committee, Greater Sudbury also provides a greater benefit than other Social Assistance offices in Ontario in the area of orthodontic treatment. As such, it is further recommended that an adjudication process be created in order to ensure that orthodontic treatment is provided to those most in need and that all other options are properly explored before approving treatments that are submitted by Orthodontists. An adjudication process that is intended to balance the needs of the clients while not creating additional barriers to access is currently being reviewed. The new process will be finalized before approving any orthodontic claims in 2018.

Discretion Based on Individual Need

Greater Sudbury provides greater discretionary benefits in many areas; however, there are a limited number of requests that fall outside of the current policy that would have a positive impact on the health and well-being of clients. A change in policy would allow for this type of benefit to be paid in exceptional circumstances, and it will give Social Services the ability to provide a high impact benefit to clients, which is in line with the modernization efforts that have been outlined by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Social Services finance staff will continue to monitor the Discretionary Benefits budget on a monthly basis to ensure that the budget is in line with the increased budget approved by Council for January 1, 2018. Further updates will be brought to the Community Services Committee if demand increases for discretionary items thus affecting the approved budget.

Next Steps

Upon approval of City Council, Social Services will revise the rate chart effective January 1, 2018 and an adjudication process will be implemented to adjudicate orthodontic claims. The Social Services Division will create a new process to deal with the small number of claims that fall outside of the current policy that relies on Supervisory discretion and approval.

Resources: Income Security: A Roadmap for Change
https://files.ontario.ca/income_security_-_a_roadmap_for_change-english-accessible_updated.pdf