

Background

In Ontario, social assistance is provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) under two Programs. The first Program is Ontario Works (OW), which is designed to support unemployed or underemployed people in temporary financial need. The second is the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), which is focused on helping people with eligible disabilities live as independently as possible and to reduce or eliminate disability related barriers to employment.

The Provincial Office of the Auditor General completed an audit of the Provincial ODSP in 2019. The audit included Provincial ODSP offices located in Hamilton, Ottawa, Sudbury and Willowdale. The objective was to assess whether MCCSS had effective systems and processes in place to:

- Ensure only eligible recipients receive income support in accordance with legislative and policy requirements;
- Provide recipients with employment supports that Caseworkers should have frequent conversations with clients to detect eligibility changes match their needs;
- Measure, evaluate, and publicly report on the effectiveness of ODSP.

Results Reporting

Over the years, the cost of the ODSP Program has increased by approximately 75% from \$3.1 billion in 2009 to approximately \$5.4 billion in 2018/19. A noteworthy factor to the Program's growing cost is the increase in ODSP assistance recipients. The audit attributed the increases due to the following:

Audit Findings	Recommendation by Auditor General
Ineligible recipients likely remain on ODSP because ODSP Caseworkers rarely assess recipients ongoing eligibility	Periodical eligibility assessment should be carried out
CRA income check not possible for thousands of applicants because caseworkers did not obtain SIN;	Caseworkers should always obtain SIN from recipients at all times.
Financially ineligible recipients may transfer from Ontario Works to ODSP	Eligibility checks must be done when transferring OW clients to ODSP
Medical reviews of recipients are overdue, increasing the risk that income support payments are being made to individuals who no longer medically qualify for ODSP	Implement a formal process to regularly review the appropriateness of decisions, documenting the rational for such decisions so that they are clearly supported and consistent with the ODSP Act
ODSP Caseworkers do not keep in touch with recipients. Some caseworkers have never spoken or communicated with recipients. This lack of contact highlights that caseworkers may not detect eligibility changes and that there is a significant risk that may affect eligibility if recipients do not report changes in their circumstances	Caseworkers should have frequent conversations with clients to detect eligibility changes

Potential Impacts

MCCSS will undertake a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving caseload growth by March 2021. Based on this analysis, MCCSS is expected to take action to ensure that only eligible individuals receive assistance from ODSP. Many recipients of ODSP have not received an updated medical report; a process will be put into place to ensure this occurs at regular intervals. As a result, a large number of ODSP clients could move from ODSP to Ontario Works if their medical report fails to meet the required eligibility criteria disability, resulting in a significant increase to caseloads. If caseloads increase significantly, it could have a potential impact in future municipal budgets as Ontario Works administration is cost-shared 50/50 between the province and municipality whereas ODSP costs are 100% covered by the Province.

Next Steps

MCCSS will be establishing a working group to assess and implement standard processes and tools related to the transfer of recipients from Ontario Works to ODSP and a process for monitoring compliance. This work is scheduled for completion by September 2020. A standard process for monitoring compliance with these requirements is expected to be implemented by September 2020.

Social Services staff will continue to monitor the situation and provide Council with updates.

References

Office of the Auditor General, Annual Report – Chapter 3, Section 3.09

http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en19/v1_309en19.pdf