

## **TO THE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION OF THE CLERK AND COUNCIL**

October 24, 2012

### **The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario Releases Its Report "*Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario*"**

Today, the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario released their much anticipated report, "*Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario*." The report, spanning 183 pages, contains 108 recommendations for improvements in areas where the Commissioners, Frances Lankin and Munir A. Sheikh, believe that the government has an opportunity to chart a new path for social assistance delivery in Ontario. In the words of the Commission, the report outlines a "course designed to support all recipients to participate in the workforce to the maximum of their abilities and to guarantee income security for those who cannot work."

Implementing the recommendations outlined in the report will impact municipalities many ways given that municipalities are the primary deliverer agents for existing provincially mandated social assistance programs. The most significant change is the Commissioners' proposal to the government to integrate Ontario Works (OW) service delivery, administered by municipalities, and the Ontario Disability and Support Program (ODSP), currently managed as a provincially delivered program. Further, the Commission is recommending that municipalities and First Nations play a greater role in managing and planning employment services in their communities, with more municipalities designated as Employment Ontario deliverers.

Underlying these recommendations is the Commissioners' view that better integrated and coordinated service delivery at the local level will improve outcomes and reduce costs. Under the new arrangement, municipalities and First Nations would assume new responsibilities for the delivery of both programs and become full partners with the Province in managing and planning employment services in their communities. In the opinion of the Commissioners, program administration at the local level makes sense as municipalities and First Nations have a better on-the-ground understanding of their communities including the labour market. The report asserts that municipal management would serve to leverage connections to local employers for social assistance recipients and improve their access to other social and human services including housing and child care.

The Commission's recommendations, if largely accepted and implemented by the government as a package rather than as a menu of options, has the potential to significantly transform social assistance delivery in Ontario. The Commissioners acknowledge that the transformative changes that they are proposing are complex and longer term in nature. These would require legislative change by the Province.

As a first step, the report identifies a number of 'early implementation priorities' for consideration by the government. These are less complex changes which are largely administrative and achievable by regulatory amendments. For example, the Commissioners are recommending rate changes for some recipients (e.g. increases for singles) and modifying the rules concerning how employment income is treated in both the OW and ODSP programs in order to create more incentives for social assistance recipients to work and retain their earnings.

At this point, what the government may or may not do with the recommendations is not yet known. AMO looks forward to working with the provincial government in their engagement of municipal governments, as well as other stakeholders, in a thoughtful review process.

As municipal governments are heavily invested in the delivery of social assistance, when the government is ready to move on any of the recommendations, AMO will need to have deep involvement in policy development discussions. Municipalities bring a wealth of practical experience to the table based on their experience with delivering the Ontario Works program as well as other social service and human service programs in their communities.

Early conversations and frequent, in-depth consultations with AMO and its member municipalities by the government are crucial to the success of this exercise. To achieve successful outcomes, Ontarians will benefit from well planned changes that are adequately resourced and allow for sufficient local flexibility to enable both innovation and efficiency in the delivery of social assistance and employment services. AMO will work closely with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) to assess the potential impacts to municipal service system managers and to inform the government on relevant implementation considerations.

Over the coming weeks, AMO will be reviewing the report's recommendations in more detail and engaging the Provincial Government on next steps. AMO will provide its members with further analysis and information as it becomes available.

To view a copy of the report, visit the website of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario at: <http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/home>

*AMO is a non-profit organization representing almost all of Ontario's 444 municipal governments. AMO supports strong and effective municipal government in Ontario and promotes the value of municipal government as a vital and essential component of Ontario and Canada's political system.*

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