



**COCHRANE DISTRICT SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD
CONSEIL D'ADMINISTRATION DES SERVICES SOCIAUX DU DISTRICT DE COCHRANE**

500 Boul. Algonquin Blvd. E.
Timmins, ON P4N 1B7

Tel: (705) 268-7722 Fax: (705) 268-8290 Toll Free / sans frais 1-877-259-7722
www.cdssab.on.ca

March 30, 2015

Deputy Minister Bohodar Rubashewsky
Hepburn Block
6th Flr
80 Grosvenor St
Toronto ON M7A1E9

Dear Deputy Minister Rubashewsky:

On behalf of the team at the Cochrane DSSAB, I would like to thank you for taking the time to do a site visit and have an open and frank conversation with frontline workers in our office. It is encouraging to have received the communication from the Minister, and then quickly have the opportunity to meet with you and the senior staff who accompanied you on your visit. At that time we committed to following up with you on outlining some of our concerns and key frustrations with the SAMS.

To begin with, the sense of frustration among frontline workers remains high. They certainly acknowledge that system fixes over the recent months have been helpful, however, still remain feeling abandoned in this process, and report that they remain self-taught and self-motivated in most instances as they struggle to serve the individuals in need who present at our doors. There has been a very obvious loss of confidence among many workers who are feeling that they do not know how to do their jobs properly any longer as a result of technical issues. Fortunately, staff remain committed to providing individual social services and meeting the needs of their clients in the best way possible given the situation. As was mentioned during our session with frontline staff, they would like to see a focus group with clients on their experience of trying to receive social services during this period of SAMS implementation. Some of the other concerns or recommendations raised during the frontline staff session included the following:

- **“Slim it and trim it”** - the experience reported by frontline workers is that there are far too many steps along the way in completing simple tasks. For example, workers are reporting that it takes on average twenty minutes to complete a referral process for the OSDP and to print out the DAU package. Often there are errors in the system even when the worker follows the step-by-step process on how to refer.

- **The length of time to complete activities has expanded** - as mentioned during the meeting one of the workers took the timing of the process to complete a verification interview for a single male applicant without income or assets. She reported under the previous system that that process would take approximately twenty-five minutes and under the new system took approximately one hour and twenty minutes. As well, she completed a verification interview with a single male applicant with one child, which saw the applicant in office for approximately an hour and a half while she struggled with the system. You will find those two situations attached.
- **Outcome planning is not an effective tool** - the screening tool is far too general to be helpful in determining an outcome plan for a participant. In addition, many of the questions are not appropriate and there are no areas to record or elaborate on significant issues such as addiction, parenting, probation or mental health concerns.
- **Overpayment tracking needs to be simplified** - when overpayments are created and then fixed an arrear occurs to offset that overpayment. Each individual overpayment, if it goes back in time, creates additional product delivery cases. The sheer number of supplemental product delivery cases is in some cases overwhelming and makes it difficult to navigate. An effective search engine does not exist to sort through all of these additional cases and they need to be removed or archived.
- **Proper mail merge options are necessary** - during the application process the printing of letters and forms takes a significant amount of time. In addition, the multitude of forms that need to be completed for one applicant, such as the Form 1, the 2212, and the consent to disclose and verify information all require individual steps through the caseworker opening the form and ensuring the correct information is plugged into it and then printing. An effective mail merge option needs to be put in place where a worker can select all forms, can select all the data that needs to be passed across into those forms, and then they can all be reviewed at once. This would absolutely result in time saving for the worker who is struggling to find precious moments during the application process as it currently stands.
- **Tasks appear as spam** - given the sheer number of tasks, and the inability to effectively sort them, tasks and notifications are being viewed by workers as nothing more than spam and not the case management tool they are supposed to be. The current search capability in the system to narrow down the scope and hone in on tasks of importance,

such as suspended cases, is not in place. In addition, tasks from closed cases dating back to early 2013 seem to be appearing on workers task lists as well. This is not a case management oriented tool at this time and must be refashioned in order to meet the needs of caseworkers.

- **The transferring of on-line applications is problematic** - given the difficulties with the on-line applications, often caseworkers are receiving files that cannot be completed at point of intake and cannot be transferred into an integrated case, leaving the workers to sort out two cases instead of one and further adding to workload issues.
- **Additional benefits and concerns** - there are ongoing issues with additional benefits and trying to issue payments. Workers often have to refresh over and over again to see if the benefit is in fact processed and are often going through the steps of closing the program, re-entering, or waiting for the next day to find out if a payment actual has gone through, impacting their ability to effectively manage their time and their caseload. Furthermore, workers are reporting that they may take the same steps to issue an additional payment two days in a row and get two different results from the system. The workload concerns are exacerbated when benefits come back as “not eligible” of using the “Legacy” benefit, which is very difficult to track. This will ultimately affect the Form 5 reconciliation and create a huge loss of time.
- **The \$250.00 fix needs a fix** - the structural problem that still exists with the CDSSAB tables sees our staff having to complete discretionary overrides for payments greater than \$250.00; however, that workaround only works once a month and the worker issuing the payment may not know until the payment fails that it is not available for another month.

In addition to the issues raised through the frontline session, the management session also allowed us a good opportunity to raise some of our concerns that we have noticed. Those concerns included the following:

- **Resources are required to continue to deliver during this period of turmoil** - funding must be ongoing for staffing and backend processing until the system normalizes. Time is needed for stabilization to occur before any other business change or return to normal operations is expected.

Letter to Deputy Minister Bohodar Rubashewsky

- **The impact on staff has been significant** - the wear and tear on staff who are working extra hours and skipping breaks to get work done is mounting. We are seeing a loss of trust in the system and in those who built it, and the frustrations resulting from being unable to effectively do their jobs on social work and financial professionals has been significant.
- **Difficulties with performance management** - reports are regularly wrong or are wrong altogether and the efficiency loss has been dramatic, and we are concerned that we will never be able to return to previous levels at the case management function.
- **Communications and knowledge transfer processes continue to be problematic** - while much of the communication has improved and has acknowledged the experience of those in the field, difficulties still abound. Many of the webinars that we have attempted to participate in have been poorly run without information provided prior to the calls, and a lack of follow-up thereafter. There doesn't appear to be an ability to share knowledge in a timely or uniform manner across the system, and there is too much reliance on the rumor mill which sees individuals sharing solutions they may have discovered to other individuals.
- **Outdated technologies** - working on older versions of Java or Google are poor business solutions. Risk abounds in securities, in confusion with other system processing and in managing the daily work flow. Steps must be taken to lift the program into current operating systems and should not be lagging so far behind.

Once again, on behalf of my team at the Cochrane DSSAB I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with us and to hear our concerns. We look forward to continue working with you in a partnership to fix the program that will allow us to better serve the most vulnerable residents of our communities.

Yours truly,



David Landers, M.B.A.

Chief Administrative Officer

DL:cp

Page 5

Letter to Deputy Minister Bohodar Rubashewsky

c.c.: Patti Redmond, Director, Social Assistance Service Delivery Branch
Martin Thumm, Executive Lead, Social Services Solutions Modernization Project
Jeff Butler, Director, Ontario Works
OMSSA

Appendix: Time Study Examples

March 6/15: Verification Interview – single male, no income/assets – existing in SDMT	
10:35	start application
11:18	forms downloaded
11:35	last form printed
11:39	begin explaining forms
11:52	interview complete
1:03	case notes
Evidence	
1:09	begin resolving evidence
1:13	authorize case
1:16	submit for approval
1:17	activate online
1:17	simulate payment
1:21	assign supervisor
1:22	complete

March 10/15: Verification Interview - single male with one child – new to social assistance	
9:28	start application
9:37	register person
9:38	application started
9:56	begin to resolve evidence
10:05	begin to print forms
10:05	system logged out
10:06	back in system
10:08	unhandled server exception error message when completing support form
10:10	form 1
10:15	form 1 printed
10:18	form 2 printed
10:21	general consent
10:23	rights and responsibilities
10:26	begin 2212
10:34	2212 printed
10:40	explained forms
10:49	sign forms
10:53	client exited office
10:56	case notes
11:04	note completed