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February 10, 2015

**To:** All front-line staff in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program offices

**From:** Dr. Helena Jaczek  
Minister

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Three months ago, the Ministry of Community and Social Services began implementing the Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS) to administer Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities.

SAMS will deliver social assistance programs more efficiently and consistently. It's a key component of the transformation of Ontario's social assistance system. I want to thank all of you – the staff who are implementing this important change – for your dedication and commitment to excellence in serving your clients through this transition. I know the implementation thus far has been challenging and I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to eliminate barriers or problems that may be causing you frustration. I am also keenly aware that a better, quicker and more responsive system is a common goal that we're working towards.

Over the past several weeks, I have visited a number of ODSP and Ontario Works offices across the province. I have experienced first-hand, alongside workers the challenges with SAMS and listened to your experiences during the transition. I have also had dozens of conversations with mayors and other municipal officials clearly expressing their concerns and the concerns of their staff.

Your voices have been heard. The implementation of SAMS must be improved.

In the coming weeks and months, my ministry will be taking specific actions to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of SAMS.

We will select an independent, third-party advisor who will provide further advice and assistance, evaluate our progress and recommend actions to help us reach our goals. Municipal partners and staff delivering services to clients will be fully engaged in this review.

I have asked my Deputy Minister and other ministry officials to increase engagement with front-line staff and initiate widespread face-to-face discussions with staff at 30 locations across the province for their insights and understanding of SAMS. This will help us in resolving implementation issues to ensure SAMS meets the needs of you and your clients.

The Technical Working Group, which we have already established with our municipal partners to help us identify and prioritize the challenges with SAMS implementation, will use a front-line users working group to increase the direct engagement of Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff on system improvements.

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All of this will take place at the same time as the project team is continuing to put into place the solutions to issues already identified.

In the coming days, the senior leadership of my ministry and the SAMS initiative will be following up with you about the steps I have just outlined.

Moving from a system like SDMT to an advanced one like SAMS is a challenging yet important change. It will allow us to improve service for the people we are working to help, streamline business processes, enhance program integrity and respond more quickly to policy and program changes at a reduced cost. I hope that through this letter and our actions in the coming weeks and months that you will see both an improvement and our unwavering commitment to implementing the best system for you and your clients. The lessons we are learning through this implementation will also help us inform similar government projects in the future.

With your help, we will continue to deliver quality service, and provide the support social assistance clients need to become more independent and improve their lives.

Sincerely,

Dr. Helena Jaczek  
Minister

Attachment: SAMS Implementation Action Plan

## **Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS) Action Plan**

In the coming weeks and months, the Ministry of Community and Social Services will be taking specific actions as outlined below to deal with immediate issues and improve the implementation of the Social Assistance Management Systems (SAMS).

### 1) Appointment of third-party advisor

The ministry will be bringing in a third-party advisor to conduct an independent assessment of SAMS implementation up to this point, as well as the ministry's plan to improve system functionality and associated business processes as the implementation proceeds. The advisor will be consulting with municipal partners and front-line ODSP staff. The advisor will provide the Minister with an interim report by March 31, 2015, which will include short-term priorities to address the most urgent issues with the system and recommendations for further redesign and possible future improvements. A final report is due by April 30, 2015, with more comprehensive recommendations for the future of the system.

### 2) Staff and engagement

In addition to engagement already undertaken, the Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services and other ministry officials will be conducting extensive face-to-face engagement with Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff at over 30 locations across the province over the next two months. This will help to solicit input about system issues and ensure SAMS meets the needs of social assistance delivery partners and clients.

### 3) Front-line Users Working Group

A Technical Working Group, made up of municipal and provincial front-line staff, managers and technical staff, will continue to help the ministry identify and prioritize challenges transitioning to SAMS. This group will be supported by the creation of a front-line users working group to get further input on system improvements from Ontario Works and ODSP front-line staff.

### 4) System improvements

The ministry will be implementing a number of additional prioritized system improvements over the next two months. These include:

- Improving the way the system calculates outcomes using converted data.
- Reducing the complexity of re-granting cases that have already been in the system.
- Improving the accuracy of some letters.

Issues being addressed have been prioritized based on frontline ODSP and Ontario Works' staff input as well as technical support teams, which were deployed to all sites to identify performance issues. It is anticipated that cumulatively, and in addition to changes already implemented, these improvements will have a significant positive impact on user experience.

The improvements will also address performance issues with specific screens and functions identified through on-site testing in December.

5) Training support

The ministry will be working with delivery agents to provide further supports including training and troubleshooting assistance.