



January 19, 2015

Hon. Kathleen Wynne  
PREMIER AND PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL  
Government of Ontario  
Room 281, Legislative Building  
Queen's Park, Toronto ON  
M7A1A1

Dear Premier:

**RE: Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) Implementation:  
A Critical Problem for Northern Social Service Deliverers**

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together Northern Ontario's 11 Municipal Service Managers. We are writing to you to make you aware of the difficult situation your government has placed social service deliverers in as we try to move forward with implementing your government's Social Assistance Management System (SAMS).

NOSDA members have significant concerns with the implementation of SAMS. Our members are presently dealing with a variety of difficulties that are directly impacting our ability to properly serve the citizens of Northern Ontario in a timely and professional manner. Some of the more prominent issues include the frustration of our clients, lengthy delays in processing, less time available for case management due to time required for SAMS implementation which is creating backlogs of work, the lack of involvement of our IT and Finance staff in advance of SAMS' development and the high direct and indirect human and financial costs related to staff overtime necessitated by SAMS' implementation.

Currently the Ministry of Community and Social Services' position is that CMSMs and DSSABs are processing information through the new SAMS. However, in many cases, information is being completed manually (pre- SDMT). Often, information is added to SAMS after staff have met with clients and only if staff have time. Manual client records are being maintained and reliance on these manual records is still being used to verify pay runs, client eligibility etc. This has masked from the Ministry, from our clients as well as from our municipal partners the true magnitude of the seriousness of the



problems with SAMS. Your government must be made aware of the true “status” of the system as opposed to the SAMS status reports you and MCSS currently are receiving.

The SAMS program is not delivering the anticipated services we were told it would perform. SAMS is not being used due to significant errors in the converted database. This continues to result in inaccurate system-generated letters to clients showing arrears paid or unpaid that do not reflect the actual client status. Also disturbing is the fact that SAMS is still not fully operational - many aspects of the program are not yet “turned on”. This has provided for less issue identification ‘tickets’ and has forced even more workarounds to provide clients services. Most fixes are workarounds to correct programming issues. SAMS has numerous workarounds and disabled features which affect social service deliverers.

This is also creating a significant backlog of work that is being deferred - which at some point CMSMs and DSSABs are going to have to address. Costs and effect on staff have not been evaluated and are not being addressed. Premier, how can we move into a recovery mode when the system is still not stable or operating within its espoused design criteria? We are still in ‘disaster mode’, but it appears that this has not been effectively communicated to you or to Ministry staff. Furthermore, the Minister is continuing plans for additional program changes. To date, changes to the Addiction Services Initiative are being implemented, while changes to employment benefits are still being planned. It is imperative that all other program changes to Ontario Works cease until SAMS is fully operational.

The continued effect of the poorly designed and implemented SAMS system has resulted in outcomes in our program delivery sites that are completely opposite to the Provincial Social Assistance Reform Strategy of simplifying the rules and streamlining processes so that effort could be directed towards moving clients to employment. The valuable work on assisting our clients to employment has been ground to a halt since the SAMS implementation.

If we must accept a program that does not meet the design parameters outlined to us, why should we be expected to share the responsibility (cost & staff time) with the Province to correct the deficiencies that have been foisted upon us?

The following is a list of the major issues related to SAMS implementation facing the Service Managers across the North:

- Payment amounts on cheques do not match the cheque register. Information on cheque stubs do not reflect the correct rationale for payment. Verification of payments continue to be addressed manually. Staff have extremely limited confidence in converted data.





- Data entry for clients appears to be averaging two to three times longer to enter into SAMS as opposed to the previous system (SDMT). It has yet to be determined if this is a staff training issue, lack of coordination within the program (which may be resolved) or a 'new normal'. If it is a new normal we wonder what is the cost and implications on staff and what is the implication for the people we serve?
- Currently our staff call into the help desk with 7 to 8 issues at a time. It takes hours to get a call answered and once the call is answered, help desk staff only address 2 to 3 of the issues and request the individual call back so that they may move to another CMSM or DSSAB's issues. Resolution of the initial 7 or 8 issues takes three to four days.
- Fixes are not communicated to our staff. Fixes may address multiple issues at multiple sites; however, without communication and verification of the fix, the knowledge is not effectively communicated. Although a fix supposedly has corrected an issue; staff cannot verify that a fix has addressed the problem until they access each client file. This is resulting in multiple re-ticketing for problems that were indicated as resolved.
- The SAMS system browser is not compatible with other browsers or other Ministries' programs such as Child Care. This has impacted on our IT resources and caused numerous workarounds locally to prevent data corruption and possible access to our programs and data.
- From a Human Resources perspective, the system has resulted in a tremendous demand on staff, both in time requirements for processing and difficulties in ensuring effective/compassionate client service. The issue of labour unrest within the Ministry only adds to the concerns regarding service delivery. Increases in sick leave and EAP programs have been noted by some CMSMs and DSSABs.
- Currently very little financial accountability features are active within the SAMS system. This has both long term and short term effects on CMSMs and DSSABs. Financial reconciliations for monthly, quarterly and annual requirements cannot be met. Many service deliverers have implemented manual reconciliations and estimates outside the SAMS program to provide information within their organization. This is currently impeding some of our year end audits, 2015 budgets, and reporting requirements.

Finally, we need to have a clear working group committee structure and reporting relationship with performance outcome measures. Currently our committees exist at the will of the Province and are not truly collaborative. If we are partners at the table then we should be treated as partners. The setting of agendas,



NORTHERN ONTARIO  
SERVICE DELIVERERS  
ASSOCIATION

meeting dates and committee structure should be developed jointly and collaboratively and not autocratically as they are now. Since the implementation of SAMS, even with the number of meetings we have had and the various proposals that have been communicated, little has changed at the front lines and no true fixes appear to have been achieved. Continued inaction is going to impact on CMSMs and DSSABs greatly in 2015.

Northern service deliverers are like 'canaries in a coal mine'. The effects of the necessary and ongoing changes to SAMS are more acute and quicker to impact resources (staffing and budget) in smaller DSSAB's and CMSM's. These changes also negatively impact service to our clients. The capacity and flexibility to adapt is not available to the extent of larger service deliverers in major urban areas.

Premier, SAMS implementation to date has been a failure. For the above noted reasons, we ask that appropriate resources be provided by the Province to help mitigate this unparalleled disaster in technological change management and to limit the negative effects on the clients we serve.

We do appreciate the recent MCSS proposal to establish a Virtual Northern Resource Centre for NOSDA members that will dedicate 2 hours per day for a 4 week period. This will give each NOSDA site dedicated access to SAMS experts who can assist them in resolving issues or problem cases. We think this is a very good first step and should help our staff significantly. More creative solutions to help us directly with SAMS and indirectly with the wake of issues that its implementation has created would be most appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this ongoing crisis in social service delivery in Northern Ontario. Let us work with you to identify what resources we need on a go-forward basis to correct these serious problems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Scripnick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary Scripnick, Chair

cc. Minister Helen Jaczek, MCSS  
Catherine Matheson, President, OMSSA  
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, AMO  
Al Spacek, FONOM  
David Canfield, NOMA