

**Ministry of  
Community and  
Social Services**  
80 Grosvenor Street  
Hepburn Block, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9  
**Social Assistance Operations  
Division**  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Tel: 416 325-5374  
Fax: 416 325-5432

**Ministère des Services  
sociaux et communautaires**

80, rue Grosvenor  
Édifice Hepburn, 6<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1E9

**Division des opérations relatives à l'aide  
sociale**  
Sous-ministre adjointe  
Tél : (416) 325-5374  
Télec. : (416) 325-5432



February 12, 2015

Catherine Matheson  
President  
Ontario Municipal Social Services Association  
1 Dundas Street West, Suite 2500  
Toronto ON M5G 1Z3

Dear Catherine,

Thank you for your letter of January 29, 2015 regarding the implementation of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS). I have appreciated the opportunity to engage with you and the other 46 OMSSA leads on addressing the challenges we have experienced with the implementation of SAMS.

As outlined in the Minister's letter dated February 10<sup>th</sup> regarding SAMS, we think it is vitally important that we continue to work together with all of our municipal partners on how to move forward with SAMS. We need to engage with front line users of the system to get a real sense of the challenges and focus on the solutions. Despite the implementation challenges, SAMS will make service delivery better for clients. It will allow us to improve customer service, streamline business processes, enhance program integrity and respond more quickly to policy and program changes.

The third party review announced by the Minister will help ensure that SAMS fulfills the goal of a system that provides our staff and delivery partners with the tools they need to do their jobs effectively in delivering social assistance to people in need. An independent assessment will help ensure that our collective efforts are appropriately focused and that we are taking all practical steps to complete the transition to SAMS. We anticipate that procurement of the third party advisor will be completed by about February 24, at which point we will quickly confirm a workplan, including an approach to engaging CMSMs and DSSABs in the work of the advisor.

Over the last few weeks, we have made significant progress with the identification of priority technology changes that will help support improvements to day-to-day functionality and streamline work for our front line staff. With the assistance of the technical working group, we have a confirmed list of the priority issues including data conversion, payments, intake, letters, tasks, reports and slow pages. We have already made significant progress on the priorities identified and in partnership with you, we are working to resolve all of these issues by the end of March.

With the formation of a front line user group to complement the technical working group, we will gain even more valuable insight into key areas of focus in order to improve the user experience and supports required to reach the full potential of SAMS. I think we saw the potential benefit of this type of engagement at our recent discussion with CUPE members. We look forward to discussing our proposed approach with OMSSA in the near future.

In your letter you raised a number of immediate considerations and first steps, many of which are being addressed through the various efforts I have outlined above, but I would like to specifically respond to each:

1. There is no question that the complexity of current social assistance program rules has presented a formidable challenge in the implementation of modernized social assistance technology. We acknowledge that further changes need to be implemented in SAMS, however it is a system that can indeed support Ontario's social assistance system as it exists today and one that will enable and support longer term reform far more effectively than would have been possible with SDMT. SAMS is indeed designed to deliver the program as it is currently defined, in a manner that treats clients fairly and consistently across the Province. It will also provide both municipal partners and the ministry with much better information to measure this goal. On the issue of funding, the ministry has provided \$10M in 100% funding to municipalities to support the implementation of SAMS to date as well as bearing 100% of the costs of system development (\$240 million). Nevertheless, the Ministry recognizes that many CMSMs and DSSABs are continuing to incur additional costs and we are considering further support options. .
2. With the assistance of the technical working group, we have an agreed-upon list of improvements and fixes and have specified timing for implementation. We released this to all CMSMs and DSSABs on Friday February 6<sup>th</sup>. As noted above, we will continue to engage with CMSMs and DSSABs on building out the various elements of a business recovery plan. The independent third party review will potentially add to our plan as it identifies further areas of focus and strategies to improve the functionality of SAMS. The user group of front line staff will also ensure that the plan is comprehensive. In addition to improvements and fixes, we also expect that these various processes and discussions will identify promising best practises across the province that would benefit other users. All of these efforts combined will provide CMSMs and DSSABs with the understanding of expectations to budget resources effectively.
3. The ministry recognizes that delivery agents have taken measures to support SAMS implementation, including the redeployment of specialized staff to assist with Ontario Works intakes. The additional temporary workload reduction measures announced in December 2014 aim to provide greater flexibility for delivery agents to manage SAMS post-implementation and support stabilization. We will revisit these measures in late March and determine what measures might need to continue or be modified. We are mindful of the operating environment and the necessity to support the transition to SAMS, and we will work with CMSMs and DSSABs on a realistic approach to reporting requirements. In the near term, a key focus will be on performance measures that will assist us all in assessing progress towards regular business operations. When we last met, a number of you rightly highlighted the importance of establishing such measures. In our initial discussions with a number of CMSMs and DSSABS regarding business recovery, we have discussed the potential performance reporting that can be achieved through SAMS as well as some areas that we may wish to measure through other approaches. I look forward to our ongoing discussions on this through the business recovery working group.

4. The Ministry is aware of the impact that new initiatives have on service delivery and has taken specific measures to recognize that front line staff are continuing to make significant efforts to support our transition to SAMS. Therefore, the implementation of the new Employment-Related Benefit, originally planned for April 1, 2015, has been postponed to October 1, 2015. For ASI Renewal monitoring, we provided participating CMSMs and DSSABs the option to delay the start date of February 2, 2015 to June 1, 2015 (or earlier if feasible) as we recognized that some sites were able to proceed while others were not. We have also reached out to other provincial ministries to ask that they take into consideration the impact of the transition to SAMS when considering initiatives that have a service delivery impact on CMSMs and DSSABs. For any other potential program changes, we will consult with CMSMs and DSSABs around implementation timing and options with a view to minimizing workload impact.
5. We fully agree that SAMS users will continue to need a training environment for new staff and those requiring additional support. We are currently exploring the best approach to support these needs. In the short-term, the site readiness environment continues to be available. We would propose focused discussions by the business recovery working group around both immediate and longer term training needs.
6. While some IT and SAMS staff may be able to travel to a particular location to deal with a critical issue, we believe that virtual support is generally the most effective and efficient approach to maximizing the impact of the inevitably finite support capacity we have. We would nevertheless welcome further discussion around opportunities to continue to improve the support model.
7. I trust our discussion regarding Ministry contingency plans and the delivery of ODSP in the event of a labour disruption provided the necessary clarity on this issue.

In conclusion, I continue to look forward to our ongoing partnership in the transition to SAMS, including our focus on business recovery moving forward.



Richard Steele  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Social Assistance Operations Division

- C: Bohodar Rubashewsky, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Laurie LeBlanc, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Pat Vanini, Executive Director, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Gary Scripnick, Chair, Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
Kira Heineck, Executive Director, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association

