OMSSA

**Ontario Municipal Social
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January 29, 2015   Sent via email: Richard.Steele@ontario.ca

Richard Steele
Assistant Deputy Minister, Social Assistance Operations
Ministry of Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor St
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Dear Richard,

Thank you for attending the meeting of the OMSSA 47 Leads. Our members appreciated the opportunity to discuss with you and your staff the ongoing challenges with the implementation of the province's Social Assistance Management System (SAMS).

OMSSA recognizes the important first steps that have been made in examining and beginning to address the difficulties of SAMS implementation, most notably through the MCSS-OMSSA SAMS Subgroup and the SAMS Implementation Technical Working Group.

However, as you heard from the OMSSA 47 Leads, SAMS implementation is having far reaching, and by all accounts, will have long term impacts and implications for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs). Impacts that will affect the well-being of clients, staff and their organizations.

Our members are in agreement: the provincially mandated critical infrastructure (SAMS) has created a crisis for CMSMs and DSSABs*.*

What our members need is a plan and critical timeframes by which SAMS will operate more effectively and efficiently than SDMT.

OMSSA is ready to work with you and your Ministry on a remediation plan that in both the near and over the long term will alleviate growing capacity constraints.

Our members have identified the following as immediate considerations and first steps:

1. SAMS is a rule based off the shelf solution that may have the ability to support a social assistance system that has fewer rules. It is not managing the over 800 complex rules and myriad sub-rules and exceptions to rules that the current social assistance program has.

CMSMs and DSSABs must be reimbursed 100% for the extra staff (including corporate administrative staff and resources) that have and will be needed to support clients at least at levels they were previously supported.

2. As indicated above, our members need a plan. In an effort to work towards a more stable state, the province work with OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs on its plan forward and commit to a schedule which includes dates for fixes as well as centralized clean-up of data. Achieving this in the first quarter is important.

    CMSMs and DSSABs need a realistic understanding of the expectations and demands on their staff and organizations of ongoing SAMS implementation in order to budget and allocate resources effectively for 2016.

3. Requirements to meet service plans and employment targets for 2015 at this time are not achievable.

    The province must work with CMSMs and DSSABs on what 2015 reports and data will be required, if any at all, until SAMS is fully stabilized

    If this is not possible, we ask that provisions be made for training including the cost of new staff and overtime that are needed to meet provincial reporting requirements and obligations.

4. No other provincial systems, initiatives or expectations should be placed on CMSMs and DSSABs until SAMS is stabilized.

    We encourage the Ministry of Community and Social Services to work with other ministries to ensure that the current pressures and capacity limitations on CMSMs and DSSABs are understood.

5. The release of SAMS was proceeded by a number of years of training for CMSM and DSSAB staff. The training provided leading up to and in anticipation of SAMS implementation did not prepare staff for the system of SAMS they are now required to work with.

    To remedy this, we ask the province to reopen and maintain a training environment for the retraining of current staff and new staff.

6. In order for CMSMs and DSSABs to improve and expand their current business delivery capacity, program, IT and training staff working on SAMS should be available to travel to all CMSMs and DSSABs until the system is stable.

7. In the event of provincial labour disruption, given the current state of SAMS implementation, CMSMs and DSSABs cannot be considered as a contingency plan for Ontario Disability Support Program service delivery.

The above represent immediate considerations and actions that OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs recommend to bring some stability to the current situation.

As you know, there are significant longer term concerns regarding SAMS including client impacts and what achieving "stability" will mean to the Ontario Works system and the business recovery of CMSMs and DSSABs. This includes but is not limited to the fallout of overpayments, incorrect payments and the very real concern that working with SAMS has taken away important time with clients.

A key principle of Ontario Works is that clients are assisted to help find sustainable employment and achieve self-reliance. Another key principle is the importance of "system integrity". Currently CMSMs and DSSABs are providing only income assistance and doing so at a significant cost to staff and clients alike.
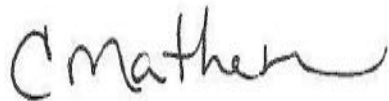
There is ongoing and increasing concern with the well-being of staff. The erosion of confidence in SAMS is impacting the health and well-being of many and resulting in increasing frustration and labour relation tensions.

This current state is counterintuitive not only to the requirements of CMSMs and DSSABs under legislation, regulations and directives, but fundamentally, to the province's poverty reduction commitments.

OMSSA and its members, like you, look forward to system stability beginning with what has been outlined above, and for the long term.

We look forward to working together on resolving and addressing the impact of SAMS implementation.

Sincerely,

Catherine Matheson
President, OMSSA

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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
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