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September 28, 2018

**Minister Lisa MacLeod**

Ministry of Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street, 6th Floor, Hepburn Block  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1E9

Dear Minister MacLeod,

As a follow up to our meeting at AMO on August 19 and our discussion about your review of social assistance in Ontario we are pleased to provide you with our perspective on reforming social assistance in Ontario, to be considered as part of your Ministry's 100-day review. These recommendations are designed to improve productivity, produce stronger outcomes, and provide greater capacity to focus on service delivery in a more efficient manner.

We look forward to meeting with your staff in the coming weeks to discuss this report, which we hope will serve as the foundation for an ongoing discussion on how we can work together to achieve the goals set out by your government to better serve taxpayers and our communities.

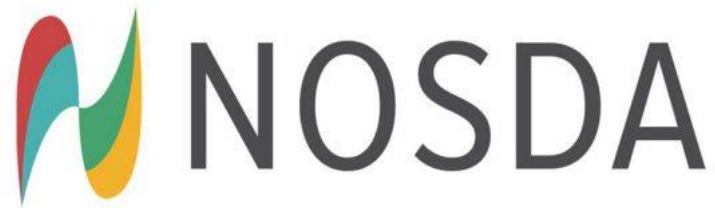
If you have any questions or would like to further discuss this opportunity, please do not hesitate to contact Nick Stewart, NOSDA's Executive Director, via telephone at (705) 806-2220, or via email at [nick.stewart@nosda.net](mailto:nick.stewart@nosda.net)

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iain Angus', is written over a light grey circular stamp.

Iain Angus  
Chair  
NOSDA

***NOSDA: The Authoritative Voice for Human Services in Northern Ontario***



# **Social Assistance Reform in Ontario**

*Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association  
(NOSDA) Submission to Minister Lisa MacLeod*

September 28, 2018

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# Summary of Recommendations

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1. Replace the current Ontario Works Outcome Plan with a Personal Pathway to Employment Plan that includes a comprehensive common assessment tool for all Ontario Works recipients.
2. Provide an initial three-month, intensive assistance phase for first-time Ontario Works applicants, during which there should be limited asset restrictions and fewer conditions of assistance.
3. Establish a joint partnership committee with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and NOSDA members so as to secure sufficient resources and supports to address mental health and substance abuse/addictions for Ontario Works recipients.
4. Enhance community placement as a potential component of the pathway to employment.
5. Support and expand social assistance recipient education programs that have demonstrated success in transitioning clients to positive employment outcomes.
6. Remove the pursuit of education as a barrier to qualification for Ontario Works benefits.
7. Establish formal mechanisms for DSSABs/CMSMs to jointly plan with the Province on the range and type of employment and training service offerings in communities in order to meet the needs of job seekers and employers within the context of local labour market conditions.
8. Allow interested DSSABs/CMSMs to become Employment Ontario service deliverers if they so choose; in such cases, the provincial and federal funding should cover 100% of the actual cost of service delivery.
9. Allow interested DSSABs/CMSMs to assume the role of service system manager of provincially funded employment and training services where the need exists.
10. Change the present Ontario Works eligibility process from an extensive document verification process to a risk-based verification process.
11. Develop common eligibility requirements across various elements of the spectrum of services related to social assistance, including housing, childcare, and essential skills.
12. Simplify and improve functionality of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS).
13. Reduce social assistance directives in coordination with service delivery agencies.

14. Allow a percentage of the savings that arise from medium- and long-term outcome improvement to be reinvested back into additional system/program efficiencies.
15. Facilitate greater cooperation between Ontario Works and ODSP with an eye to reducing regulatory overlap and wait times while transferring Ontario Works files.
16. Move the administration of some benefits for social assistance recipients out of the system and into ministries or agencies who may process them more effectively and efficiently.
17. Establish a framework by which the LHINs and NOSDA members can engage directly in integrated health service planning, local planning, and healthcare resource allocation to address issues affecting the social determinants of health.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Purpose

While Ontario's social assistance system is a crucial component of the province's social safety net, it has become deeply fragmented and complex over time. It is clear that action is needed to provide service deliverers the necessary policy and resource tools to best support those Ontarians on social assistance and to work toward the elimination of their dependency on the system.

It is against this backdrop that the Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services Lisa MacLeod recently announced a 100-day deadline, effective Nov. 8, 2018, to “develop and announce a sustainable social assistance program that focuses on helping people lift themselves out of poverty.”<sup>1</sup>

As such, the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) is pleased to be able to offer this report in response to a direct request made by Minister MacLeod at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario annual conference on Aug. 19. Stemming from a series of meetings and consultations with the senior leadership at NOSDA throughout September, the purpose of this report is to provide a list of meaningful, cost-effective recommendations to be considered as part of the Ontario government's 100-day review.

## 1.2 Background

The members of Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) coordinate the effective delivery of human services – including social assistance – to the people of Northern Ontario. The NOSDA membership includes 11 service system managers (about one-quarter of Ontario's service system manager group) through 10 District Social Service Administration Boards, and one Consolidated Municipal Service Manager, the City of Greater Sudbury (see Appendix 1). The CAOs of NOSDA have over 150 years of combined experience and knowledge in delivering social assistance programs, and preside over a social assistance budget approaching \$200 million.

Currently, there are approximately 49,000 people on social assistance in Northern Ontario (see Appendix 2). The majority, or two-thirds, of this group are on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) while the remaining one-third is on Ontario Works (OW). Taking the dependents of these ODSP and OW recipients into account, the number of social assistance beneficiaries in Northern Ontario increases to 72,500 people.

Given this situation and its related challenges, NOSDA sees the need for policy reform, especially given the 43% growth (193,000 people) in the provincial caseload since the Great Recession (Oct. 2008), and the ensuing policy environment (see Appendix 3). During that same period, Ontario's population growth has been about 11%, meaning that the growth in social assistance is outpacing population at a rate of about four to one. This is noteworthy, as the

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario News Release, July 31 2018.

Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) 2018-19 budget was set at about \$13.3 billion (8.5% of the provincial budget), two-thirds or \$8.7B of which, is for OW and ODSP. As the current systemic issues unnecessarily restrict the ability to successfully assist more individuals transition to employment, these trends are increasingly unsustainable, and speak to the need for reform.

The challenges associated with delivering social assistance are significant within NOSDA's significant coverage area: Northern Ontario in particular faces a growing scarcity of many of the corollary structural supports, which are exacerbated by the significant distances between municipalities and the shrinking number of options for inter-community travel and accessing services. Moreover, the North continues to experience higher outmigration of people and talent, and fewer employment opportunities than is typically seen throughout southern Ontario. These issues are further complicated by the lack of more advanced technological options to help bridge the distance in certain areas, and even basic technology is often unaffordable or unavailable for the poor.

In the future, the North will experience significant retirements from existing employment and a concerted effort must be taken by all to attract and retain their replacements. Employable OW clients are one logical source of the next generation of workers.

The proposed system reform is also needed to alleviate undue pressure on administrative resources. As it is currently structured, the social assistance system requires that the majority of the efforts of front-line caseworkers be dedicated to administrative issues which in turn, reduce the amount of time available for helping people into employment and out of poverty. As one example, the overburden of rules encourages fraud in order for social assistance recipients and their families to make ends meet. This contributes to the constant policing and verification that staff needs to do when their time could be better spent on developing pathways to employment. These gaps create long-term consequences throughout the system, with every delay translating into greater likelihood that those who rely on social assistance will require it for increasingly lengthier periods, adding undue pressure on an already overburdened system.

In addition, the ability to move individuals and families off social assistance is complicated by the absence of services necessary to address barriers to success in many communities, as well as the lack of transportation, barriers to attaining an education, increase in mental health and addictions and the siloed approach to systems management.

The costs resulting from these challenges are borne throughout the system, resulting in greater pressures on the health care, social service, and justice systems. In other words, Ontario and its municipalities cannot afford to continue with the status quo; we all have a shared interest in supporting people's ability to thrive so that they may better engage as economic and social participants in our communities. The recommendations in this report are therefore designed to offer the Ontario government's 100-day review the initial means to address these hindrances, the regulatory burden, and overall system costs in a manner that will allow Ontario Works staff to spend more time on providing assistance and generating greater employment outcomes throughout the North and beyond.

# 1.3 Guiding Principles

As part of the process of developing the report’s recommendations, NOSDA espoused specific guiding principles so as to ensure that its proposals could generate positive results for those in need, while respecting the taxpayer as well as the integrity of the process. To that end, this paper specifically focuses on the following approaches:

## No new costs to municipalities or the province

True reform, achieved through effective redesign of current systems, should and must be done in a way that recognizes the significant financial constraints currently faced by all orders of government. While reforming the system will incur some transitional costs, many efficiencies exist that can generate significant savings of taxpayer dollars and system resources over the short and long term, which can in part be reinvested into transitioning the system to one with fewer burdens and better outcomes.

## Recognition of regional differences

As NOSDA is focused on the policy needs that are unique to its Northern Ontario members, this paper seeks to reflect those particular challenges. For example, while the population density average in the province of Ontario is approximately 14.8 persons per square kilometre, the Rainy River district has a population density of 1.4 persons per square kilometre, creating an entirely different set of circumstances and challenges.

That said, there are nevertheless significant differences in capacity, and program effectiveness even within NOSDA’s own coverage area; this is unsurprising, as its coverage area includes 11 members spanning 80 percent of Ontario’s landmass. As such, this paper has found common ground between those various subregions while also allowing both them and the government to have the flexibility to devise solutions that work best for all.

## Recognition of system / sectoral interconnectedness

The aforementioned challenge in addressing administrative complexity within the social assistance system is due in many ways to its deep ties to other areas of service delivery, levels of government, and sectors of the economy. For instance, an individual’s employability is all too often connected to their ability to receive appropriate mental health supports, housing, and education. Much of this paper is predicated on the recognition of that interconnectedness, and attempts to highlight the related challenges faced by service deliverers and governments alike.

## Cultural appropriateness

The social assistance system caters to a diverse clientele, and any means of addressing the challenges inherent in that system must also ensure that they are respectful and reflective

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Immigrants</u>	<u>Aboriginal</u>
Ontario	13,448,494	29.1%	2.8%
Northeast Ontario	548,449	5.5%	12.9%
Northwest Ontario	231,691	6.7%	25.9%

of their equally diverse needs; in particular, any changes to social assistance policy must be mindful of the Indigenous and immigrant populations in Northern Ontario.



## 1.4 Report Structure

The recommendations in this report are designed to offer the Ontario government's 100-day review the initial means to address the indicated hindrances, the regulatory burden, and overall system costs in a manner that will allow workers to spend more time on providing assistance and generating greater employment outcomes throughout the North and beyond.

To arrive at these goals in a way that accurately captures the intent of the review and the needs of Northern Ontario service delivery, the recommendations have been broadly grouped in the following policy areas:

- *Barriers to employment / employability*
- *Education (clients, personnel)*
- *Red tape reduction / productivity, simplification*
- *Social determinants of health*

The following section provides NOSDA's recommendations for the provincial overview of the social assistance system. The content is presented in the *policy area* to which it relates, the *challenges and limitations* of the current policy, the *issue summary* for the proposed recommendation for policy reform, and the subsequent *recommendations*.

# 2.0 Recommendations

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## 2.1 Policy Area: Barriers to Employment & Employability

### 2.1.1 Problem Statement

**Under the current social assistance system, employment outcomes are weak with relatively few recipients exiting to employment on a permanent and long-term basis.**

### 2.1.2 Issue Summary

The present Outcome Plan for Ontario Works recipients is too generic, offering a “one-size-fits-all” approach which has proven to be an inefficient means of transitioning individuals to successful employment outcomes. This is due in part to the lack of a standard method for assessing the employment suitability and other important characteristics of social assistance recipients. While the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) includes an assessment tool, its design means that it is used inconsistently -- if at all -- by service system managers; some case manager feedback suggests the tool is insufficient for adequately determining an individual’s level of employability, and lacks the necessary flexibility and integration.

The challenges inherent in the system’s design also means that Outcome Plans for recipients are unavoidably generic, and therefore not optimally positioned to serve individual needs. The current lack of options in SAMS leads to pigeonholing of clients, an issue that is complicated by its inability to track progress of the client’s continuum. The result is a series of additional disconnects between partner agencies, which creates further delays and complicates recipients’ ability to transition from the system.

In addition, many Ontario Works (OW) recipients have mental health, and/or substance abuse/addictions issues. For example, in Nipissing District (where data is available), 40% of OW recipients state that they have mental health or addictions issues that impact their ability to get or keep a job. These figures are thought to be higher in other areas such as Kenora, Thunder Bay, and Rainy River where the percentage of the caseload with mental health and addictions issues is estimated to be 60% - 70%.

By most measures, these social assistance recipients are not considered to be employable and many are hard to serve. It is unrealistic to expect any concrete employment outcomes from this group without the type of on-the-ground, wraparound supports that the DSSABs/CMSMs are able to uniquely coordinate or deliver. However, under the present system, Ontario Works often lacks the tools or span of control they require to derive better outcomes around health care and employment. This is especially problematic during the first three months of assistance, as this is a key period in which the biggest impact can be had, and represents the greatest opportunity to ensure that applicants are diverted from the system; however, existing restrictions and delays at this crucial early stage often tie applicants into longer-term processes, which all but guarantees their entry into and reliance on the social assistance system.

## 2.1.3 Recommendations

### **1. Replace the current Ontario Works Outcome Plan with a Personal Pathway to Employment Plan that includes a comprehensive common assessment tool for all Ontario Works recipients.**

A Personal Pathway to Employment Plan will go much further towards improving employment outcomes and moving people off social assistance than is currently possible with the current system. Customized to each recipient based on an assessment of their employability, these plans should include tailored career assessment and goals; employment supports and training; and coordinated on-the ground, wraparound supports and services where required. This will prove most effective in coordination with the integration of a common assessment tool, which should serve as a universal access point to all employment partners.

### **2. Provide an initial three-month, intensive assistance phase for first-time Ontario Works applicants, during which there should be limited asset restrictions and fewer conditions of assistance.**

This approach will create an immediate upfront impact by ensuring that first-time applicants who can work and are employment ready can be moved off the system quickly, thereby preventing them from being ensnared cyclically within the system. For example, asset limits are currently in the range of \$10k - \$15k for most applicants, depending on their family

This could have a tangible impact on the costs of the system. For instance, a single Ontario Works recipient at the maximum shelter allowance receives \$721 a month, or \$8,652 per year, plus benefits. If the system allowed for the first three months of their potential income to be invested up front to help divert them from the system, and assuming that they would have remained on the system for a minimum of one year, the cost would be \$2,163 in order to save, at minimum, an additional \$6,489 plus benefits per individual. Similar successes spread throughout the system would compound into significant savings in both dollars and staff resources.

household type and situation. If a first-time applicant comes in to OW and is shown to be employment ready, better results could be found in disregarding these limits and other conditions of assistance for up to three months, and focusing solely on helping the individual find employment and keeping them off OW. This could serve as a form of pre-program intervention designed to provide one-time assistance to keep people from entering the system.

Meanwhile, applicants who are identified during the common assessment as having barriers to employment (such as mental health and/or addictions) will be provided with appropriate supports and services, coordinated and/or delivered by the service system managers. This is made possible through NOSDA members' delivery of complementary services: in conjunction with CHPI, IAH, Child Care and community partnerships, a network of supports is provided to recipients.

**3. Establish a joint partnership committee with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and NOSDA members so as to secure sufficient resources and supports to address mental health and substance abuse/addictions for Ontario Works recipients.**

Creating better linkages between these entities will improve the policy focus, planning, and service delivery necessary to move people off social assistance and out of poverty. There are significant mutual benefits to be realized by coordinating an individual's health outcomes with their employment outcomes.

There are numerous examples of achieving success through NOSDA member involvement: for instance, the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board was involved in the Transitional Community Support Worker (TCSW) Program as funded by the North East Local Health Integration Network through CMHA, and now has two full-time TCSW staff working in their Social Housing facilities.<sup>1</sup> This has resulted in a 33% reduction in paramedic service calls, and a 60% reduction in police calls.

**4. Enhance community placement as a potential component of the pathway to employment.**

If the common assessment finds that they are capable and appropriate for this approach, recipients should be able to be directed to receive practical work experience through community placements. This will enhance the current community placement process and facilitate greater opportunities and outcomes throughout the process.

## *2.2 Policy Area: Education*

### *2.2.1 Problem Statement*

**A relatively large number (75%) of social assistance recipients do not have postsecondary education. This is a longstanding systemic issue and is a major barrier to stable and meaningful employment.**

### *2.2.2 Issue Summary*

As a strong predictor of employment outcomes, education is paramount to stable and meaningful employment. However, the majority of social assistance recipients lack a postsecondary education or on-the-job training which limits their employment opportunities, and often translates to non-stable, part-time, low-paying jobs and subsequently high rates of recidivism. This is complicated by the changes in Northern Ontario's economic makeup, which has shifted over the last 15-20 years: many communities which relied on the natural resource sector have since shifted to service sector economies, which require entirely different sets of

skills and specialized labour forces. In addition, the pursuit of education often precludes existing Ontario Works recipients from continuing to receive those benefits, which frequently serves as a disincentive.

In short, this group does not have the education or skills needed to obtain meaningful work, which is a considerable challenge for service system managers and social assistance recipients alike. Any attempt to reform the social assistance system must address this systemic issue -- and others as outlined in 2.4 Policy Area: Social Determinants of Health -- in order to make significant progress.

### 2.2.3 Recommendations

#### **5. Support and expand social assistance recipient education programs that have demonstrated success in transitioning clients to positive employment outcomes.**

There are examples of programs designed to help social assistance recipients complete an education. Whether this involves completing a high school or post-secondary

The Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (N-PREP) pilot is showing that an investment of \$1 in the program can potentially save between \$2.60 and \$4.20 in OW recidivism costs.

education, these programs are fundamentally important to the end-goal of moving social assistance recipients to employment; two Northern Ontario examples, including past education projects completed under Ontario's Local Poverty Reduction Fund, can be found in Appendix 4. Social assistance reform should consider those education programs which show evidence of success and can be transferred to other participating service management areas and communities. Many of these education programs are scalable and their benefits could be realized at the larger provincial level.

#### **6. Remove the pursuit of education as a barrier to qualification for Ontario Works benefits.**

Education is the most effective pathway to employment for many people, and allowing Ontario Works recipients to pursue it without affecting their benefits would provide them with fewer disincentives for embarking on that path. Taking this approach would not only provide a clearer avenue to eventual diversion from the system, but it would also allow for greater flexibility for NOSDA members to pursue new and innovative projects at the local level.

One example of this approach would be to allow colleges and universities to fill vacant spaces with Ontario Works recipients, tuition free, and without penalty to their receipt of Ontario Works benefits.

## 2.3 Policy Area: Red Tape Reduction & Productivity

### 2.3.1 Problem Statement

**Ontario's social assistance system is overly complex, with many overlapping rules, regulations and requirements, which all too often create a significant burden of process for applicants, case managers, and frontline staff. This includes an extensive and intensive eligibility process, a software system (SAMS) that is overly complicated and somewhat problematic, duplication of information and data, and over 800+ policy directives to follow and administer. Simply put, there is too much time and money being spent on administering Ontario Works.**

### 2.3.2 Issue Summary

An undue percentage of the efforts of OW case managers and frontline staff is dedicated to administration as they are often required to dedicate resources to working with colleagues and clients to navigate the often-burdensome bureaucracy; this diverts time and energy that would be better used to focus on employment and producing better outcomes for clients.

For example, the OW eligibility process consists of an initial intake review, ongoing monthly income verification, and an Eligibility Verification Process. This includes the visual verification of all documents related to a person's Canadian identity, legal status, income, and assets; third-party verification of eligibility-related information; participation reviews and agreements; and the requirement that case managers have the knowledge base of numerous directives in order to make decisions. When applied across the caseload, this eligibility process is onerous, time consuming, and unproductive for case managers, and equally difficult to navigate for social assistance recipients.

The need for simplification and streamlining spans many other areas of the sector, including the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS), which is used to administer the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). This system replaced the previous social assistance technology in 2014 at a cost of roughly \$300 million, and Ontario Works staff, along with Ontario's Auditor General, identified it as having been problematic from the outset. Today, it remains a source of frustration and delays, and is even applied inconsistently. As one example, not all Ontario Works delivery agents are on SAMS, which leads to the risk that some recipients could inadvertently receive a duplication of social assistance services.

The ability of the North's CMSM/DSSABs to deliver service appropriately to their clients is also limited by the service partners they rely on to deliver the same. In other words, the fragmentation of the system complicates effective coordination of service delivery. While partnerships can and do occur to address some of those challenges, every community faces different circumstances, which may affect their ability to address those challenges. For example, while the Thunder Bay DSSAB has experienced successes in working with their local employment partners, the specific approach they have used may prove less effective in other areas, such as the District of Kenora, which has a significant number of employment delivery agencies or the District of Nipissing, which at last count, had 31 employment delivery agencies providing 224 employment-related services.

These challenges are equally true in other areas, as there are also significant resources and delays involved in transferring someone from OW to ODSP, and there exists notable administrative duplication between the two. In some cases, this fragmentation creates inefficiencies through improper housing of administrative duties, such as some of the benefits for social assistance recipients. While the current social assistance system is tasked with administering various benefits to recipients, some of these would be handled with greater efficiency in more directly related agencies, ministries, or programs; for example, much administrative work goes into providing dentures to ODSP clients. More needs to be done to mitigate the patchwork nature of the overall system, to create greater accountability, and to allow for more coordinated planning.

In short, the current system lacks coordination, making it more difficult for those on social assistance to receive the supports they need to be ready for employment programs. NOSDA has recognized that the system needs changing, and its members passed two resolutions at its 2018 AGM in June outlining the need for better integration around employment and service system management when and where it may be appropriate and desired.

### 2.3.3 Recommendations

**7. Establish formal mechanisms for DSSABs/CMSMs to jointly plan with the Province on the range and type of employment and training service offerings in communities in order to meet the needs of job seekers and employers within the context of local labour market conditions.**

By re-examining the municipal roles in employment and training services, the Province could better leverage municipal expertise, knowledge of local labour market conditions and engagement with employers to facilitate labour force and economic development in communities.

**8. Allow interested DSSABs/CMSMs to become Employment Ontario service deliverers if they so choose; in such cases, the provincial and federal funding should cover 100% of the actual cost of service delivery.**

This would rationalize services and provide a more streamlined and holistic approach to the delivery of employment services, while allowing the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development to engage in government-to-government relations with CMSM/DSSABs in the same manner as other provincial ministries where the CMSM/DSSAB are considered Municipal Service System Managers.

**9. Allow interested DSSABs/CMSMs to assume the role of service system manager of provincially funded employment and training services where the need exists.**

This would involve an exploration of a municipal system service management role for employment and training services based on local choice. This could be done at no additional cost, provided a transfer of administrative resources, and may well achieve greater efficiencies in addition to more effective service planning for communities.

**10. Change the present Ontario Works eligibility process from an extensive document verification process to a risk-based verification process.**

Shifting to a risk-based approach to eligibility and verification will allow social assistance recipients to be assessed quickly and efficiently, shifting the focus from lengthy and cumbersome forms and enforcement-based verification processes to a streamlined and efficient model of accessing financial support and services based on individual needs. This allows for individuals to receive financial support much more quickly, which in turn allows them to address barriers in employment, mental health and addictions and other areas in a more timely fashion.

Overall, this process will result in removing barriers to accessing support and reduced administration; improved work processes; and improved client services and outcomes through higher-impact interactions between case managers and clients.

**11. Develop common eligibility requirements across various elements of the spectrum of services related to social assistance, including housing, childcare, and essential skills.**

In keeping with the approach indicated above, streamlining the administrative requirements to determine eligibility across various components of the social assistance system will reduce the resources required to guide applicants through the process, particularly if combined with a common assessment tool as identified in Recommendation 1.

**12. Simplify and improve functionality of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS).**

Bolstering SAMS would allow for better outcomes within the system, while generating significant efficiencies by providing frontline staff the tools and information they need to generate the best possible outcomes for their clients. Moreover, removing some benefits from social assistance (per Recommendation 16) and reducing the number of directives (per Recommendation 13) will also help to streamline and simplify SAMS, as will removing fields that are no longer required as a result of these changes, and examining which underused capabilities it has that could allow it to be deployed more effectively.

**13. Reduce social assistance directives in coordination with service delivery agencies.**

A careful review and reduction of the current 800+ OW directives, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders, will reduce the administrative burden on OW case managers, freeing them up to spend more time with their clients and focused on employment. As many of the directives are linked and interconnected, this will not be an easy task. However, NOSDA is committed to assisting with this review.

For example, this could include measures that would allow for greater flexibility to provide employment supports, such as establishing greater freedom to use existing funding to help people get a job -- i.e. wage subsidies, training, micro-grants for business start-ups, social enterprise investment, and community development initiatives -- with appropriate monitoring of results.



**14. Allow a percentage of the savings that arise from medium- and long-term outcome improvement to be reinvested back into additional system/program efficiencies.**

This approach would allow the province to undertake a continuous process of generating additional savings in an efficient and cost-effective way, ensuring that many of the long-term initiatives that are proposed here and in the future -- such as retraining frontline staff on the reduction of administrative burdens -- will be done without posing any additional burden to the province or the municipalities.

It should also be noted that not all the savings will be monetary. Rather, some of these savings will be realized through more efficient and effective use of staff resources, improvements in service delivery, and being able to support more clients with the same number of caseworkers.

**15. Facilitate greater integration between Ontario Works and ODSP with an eye to reducing regulatory overlap and wait times while transferring Ontario Works files.**

In combination with the common assessment tool as per Recommendation 1, such measures could allow for better allocation of system resources and minimize duplication of administrative work.

**16. Move the administration of some benefits for social assistance recipients out of the system and into ministries or agencies who may process them more effectively and efficiently.**

Shifting the administration of benefits out of the social assistance delivery sector to more appropriate venues -- i.e. moving Ontario Works health benefits to the Trillium Benefit Program and health-insurance-related programs -- will significantly reduce red tape at every level and let case managers focus exclusively on creating positive employment outcomes and coordinating appropriate supports for social assistance recipients. From there, a plan should be gradually developed over time to determine how best to affordably incorporate a health benefit for low-income Ontarians, which will also support the ability of people in low-income or precarious employment to maintain their jobs rather than move back into the welfare system.

## *2.4 Policy Area: Social Determinants of Health*

### *2.4.1 Problem Statement*

**Delays in helping people to achieve employment have a negative impact on their health and well-being; this not only creates significant costs throughout those sectors and other elements of the provincial system, but in turn also further complicates their ability to obtain employment, creating a cycle of dependency that is difficult to break and costly to ignore.**

## 2.4.2 Issue Summary

Outcomes relating to employment cannot be influenced in isolation, as employment success and health are directly linked. Indeed, social determinants of health are some of the largest factors in health outcomes for Northern Ontario citizens, and failing to address them in tandem with employment strategies translates into significant costs for the province and the municipalities alike. It is critical to break down provincial ministry silos at the policy, legislative and program level so that integrated human service planning can be implemented in a manner that fully addresses the social determinants of health that impact poverty and welfare.

This is relevant to any discussion on social assistance reform as NOSDA members are provincially designated service system managers for social services, children's services, social housing, and homelessness prevention in Northern Ontario, and in many cases, the designated delivery agents for land ambulance paramedic services. In short, they are responsible for the planning and administration of key social determinants of health which impact health outcomes and the wellness of Northern communities – factors which are directly tied in many cases to employment success and social assistance in general.

However, as indicated above, the ability to deliver service appropriately and efficiently to Northern clients is complicated by restrictions and fragmentation of related service partners. As such, there needs to be a tailored approach to helping clients by seeking better coordination with other stakeholders in these areas, particularly the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) and the health care system. Additionally, as the CMSM/DSSABs are the closest thing there is to a regional government in Northern Ontario, they are well positioned to play a larger role in integrated service planning and delivery, especially at a time where being tied to other service provider's waitlists hampers their ability to successfully move social assistance recipients out of poverty and in to employment and self-sufficiency. Greater measures are needed to provide NOSDA members with the means to have more influence with their community partners and the health care system to ensure the necessary resources, services, and supports for social assistance recipients are in place and effectively delivered.

## 2.4.3 Recommendations

**17. Establish a framework by which the LHINs and NOSDA members can engage directly in integrated health service planning, local planning, and healthcare resource allocation to address issues affecting the social determinants of health.**

Greater integration of the planning process at the service management level, and including the LHIN-funded public health units, will reduce duplication and create opportunities to make more effective use of existing resources, while allowing for a more focused, cohesive approach to successfully transitioning social assistance recipients to the workforce.

## 3.0 Conclusion

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The recommendations within this report represent an important first step in offering a Northern Ontario lens through which to view the transformative opportunities inherent in the Ontario government's 100-day review of social assistance reform. These will complement the stated goals of that reform by lowering the level of system complexity in a cost-effective manner while improving the intended system outcomes.

These high-level perspectives on intensive intervention opportunities and greater system integration will ideally serve to drive additional conversations between NOSDA, Minister MacLeod, and the Ontario government in order to discuss these proposals at greater length.

It is with confidence that NOSDA suggests a stronger focus on employment and employability, greater focus on proven educational supports, reduction of red tape and better integration of service delivery around the social determinants of health. In so doing, the Ontario government can achieve significant efficiencies in administration, costs, and outcomes for the social assistance system.

NOSDA is pleased to stand as a dedicated, committed partner throughout this process and the subsequent discussion of these ideas. Representing service delivery throughout the entirety of Northern Ontario, NOSDA members offer a tremendous value proposition in the new and reformed social assistance system: their regional impact and reach is authoritative, and the breadth of their responsibilities mean that they are well poised to coordinate and deliver on-the-ground wraparound supports and services to the social assistance recipients of the North.

With the appropriate policy changes, NOSDA members can and will be empowered with the right tools to provide jobs and influence resources across corollary service areas -- health, mental health and addiction, employment -- in the communities where they operate. Indeed, within the new service environment as posed by this report, the service deliverers will be better positioned to help people out of poverty, rather than administering a system that is prone to keeping them in it.

In conjunction with the strategic decisions that the Ontario government will derive from the line-by-line audit, these recommendations will inform the results of the 100-day review and generate greater successes in social assistance service delivery to and for the people.

Together, we can determine how these and other policy details could best be rolled out. In doing so, we will ensure that our clients are able to secure stable and meaningful employment, while reducing their dependency on social assistance and help them lift themselves out of poverty to lead successful, fulfilling lives.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1. NOSDA Membership

<b>NOSDA Executive and Member Organizations</b> <a href="https://www.nosda.net/about-nosda/nosda-members">https://www.nosda.net/about-nosda/nosda-members</a>	
NOSDA Executive	Iain Angus, Chair Barry Baltessen, Vice Chair Janet Gawne, Vice Chair
Algoma District Services Administration Board	Keith Bell, CAO
Cochrane Social Services Administration Board	Brian Marks, CAO
Kenora District Services Board	Henry Wall, CAO
Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board	Fern Dominelli, CAO
District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board	Joe Bradbury, CAO
Parry Sound District Social Services Administration Board	Janet Patterson, CAO
Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board	Dan McCormick, CAO
District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board	Mike Nadeau, CAO
City of Greater Sudbury	Catherine Matheson, GM, Community Development
District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board	Bill Bradica, CAO
District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board	Don Studholme, CAO

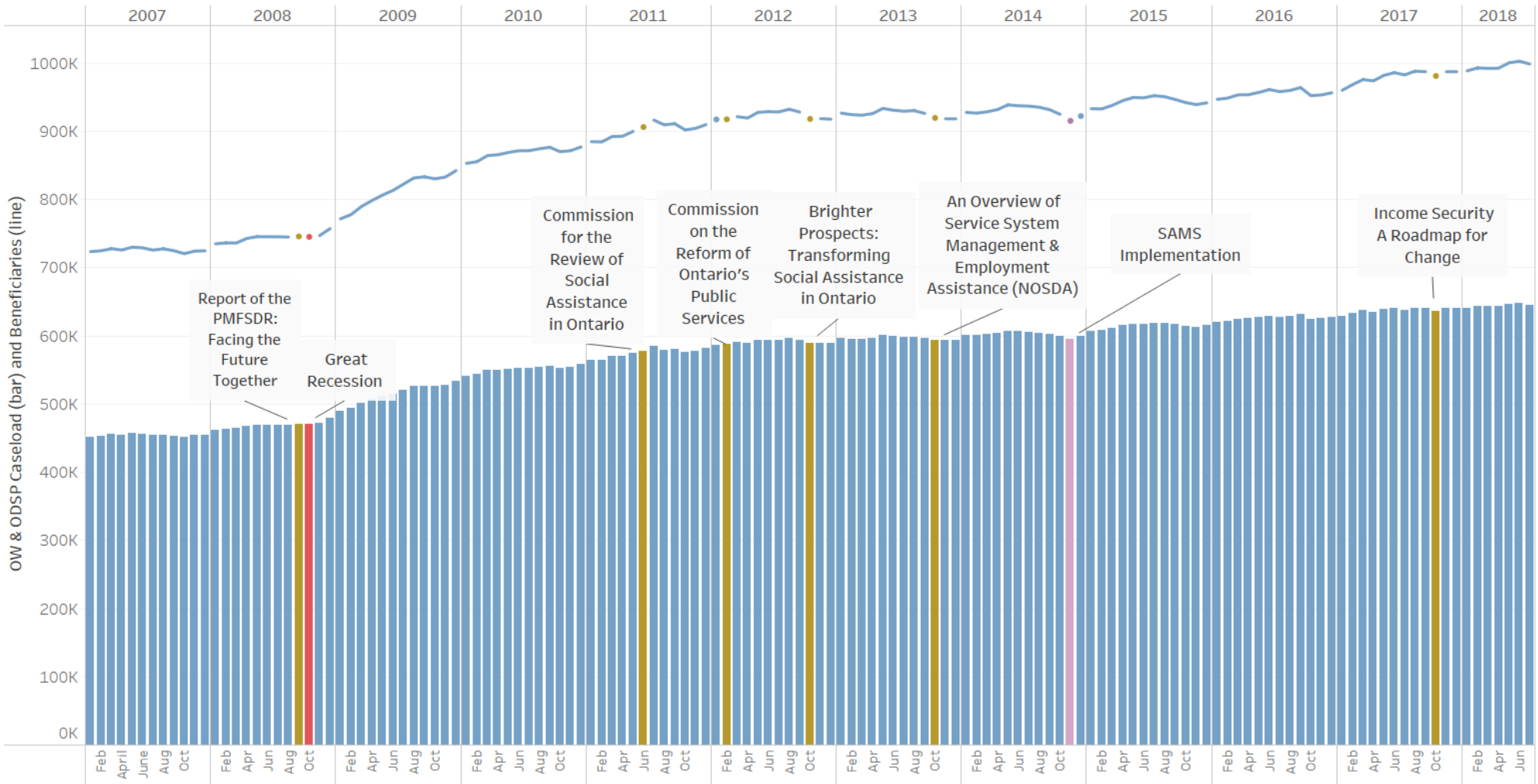
Appendix 2. Number of People on Social Assistance in Northern Ontario

NORTHERN ONTARIO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE, JULY 2018										
Area	Ontario Works (OW)				Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)				Caseload Total (OW & ODSP)	Beneficiaries Total
	Cases	Temp Cases	Caseload Total	Beneficiaries	Cases	ACSD	Caseload Total	Beneficiaries		
Algoma	667	50	717	1,247	1,593	67	1,660	2,359	2,377	3,606
Cochrane	1,548	79	1,627	3,047	3,190	145	3,335	4,580	4,962	7,627
Greater Sudbury	3,504	76	3,580	6,000	6,620	170	6,790	8,943	10,370	14,943
Kenora	576	35	611	1,257	1,223	68	1,291	1,668	1,902	2,925
Manitoulin-Sudbury	540	22	562	894	932	33	965	1,326	1,527	2,220
Nipissing	2,136	114	2,250	3,740	4,400	199	4,599	6,198	6,849	9,938
Parry Sound	688	48	736	1,304	1,530	77	1,607	2,250	2,343	3,554
Rainy River	229	2	231	401	498	37	535	711	766	1,112
Sault Ste. Marie	2,267	98	2,365	3,894	4,141	195	4,336	5,990	6,701	9,884
Thunder Bay	2,853	204	3,057	5,483	5,686	229	5,915	7,813	8,972	13,296
Timiskaming	703	30	733	1,278	1,541	69	1,610	2,167	2,343	3,445
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,711</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>16,469</b>	<b>28,545</b>	<b>31,354</b>	<b>1,289</b>	<b>32,643</b>	<b>44,005</b>	<b>49,112</b>	<b>72,550</b>

Source: Social Assistance Operations Performance Report (MCSS, July 2018).

### Appendix 3. Ontario Social Assistance Trend, 2007 to Present (July 2018)

Ontario Social Assistance Trend, Post Great Recession



## Appendix 4. **Social Assistance-Related Education Programs That Work**

### **Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program**

The Nipissing Poverty Reduction through Education Program (N-PREP) is a three-year pilot program which is nearing completion. The program was funded through the Ontario Poverty Reduction Fund and is a partnership between the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) and Canadore College.

During the pilot period (2015-2018), approximately 150 OW recipients left the Nipissing caseload to pursue post-secondary education, including some with a medium-high dependency on social assistance.<sup>2</sup> During their studies, the students (former OW recipients) were provided with full wrap-around supports and services including health/mental illness supports, individual learning and career plans, and post-graduation supports to employment. The program evaluation is showing evidence that N-PREP is increasing the probability of social assistance recipients completing college, finding meaningful employment, and reducing their dependency on social assistance. Initial cost-effectiveness analysis shows that reducing social assistance dependency for the medium-high dependency group (above), through the program is possible for a little over one-tenth (11.0%) the cost of trying to achieve the same outcome on Ontario Works. Furthermore, preliminary statistical modeling estimates that investing \$1 in N-PREP potentially saves \$3.40 (+/- .81) in OW recidivism costs.

### **Housing Programs for Education in Kenora District**

The poverty and housing crises in many of the First Nation communities in Northern Ontario is also having a direct and significant impact on the number of families uprooting and moving to communities such as Dryden, Kenora, Red Lake, and Sioux Lookout in order to access services, including education.<sup>3</sup> However, to participate in education the youth need to leave their communities, families and supports behind.

To address this problem, the Kenora DSSAB has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with one of the First Nation Councils to jointly build housing that will support the youth and their families while the youth study and complete their education. As part of this housing development, the youth and their families will also receive full support services while attending school.

On another front, the Kenora DSSAB has also entered into a partnership with the Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services (OAHS) and the Dryden Native Friendship Centre, to develop a

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<sup>2</sup> On average, the students in this medium-to-high social assistance dependency group had been on OW six different times prior to enrolling in the N-PREP and Canadore College.

<sup>3</sup> The District of Kenora has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest *child poverty rate* of all Ontario - Federal Election Districts and the 7<sup>th</sup> highest percentage of *low income families with children* of all the Federal Election Districts. Additionally, the youth in Kenora District are 8 times more likely to commit suicide than youth in the rest of Ontario.

housing program that specifically supports single mothers on social assistance while they study to complete an education and/or trade. The program requires a four-year commitment from the participants and each participant is provided with affordable housing, child care, support programs, and a direct link to an education program (this program began in the summer of 2018).