



Report To:	Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board
From:	Lori Clark, Acting Director of Integrated Social Services and Megan Sloan, Acting Ontario Works Program Supervisor
Date:	June 24, 2021
Re:	Social Assistance Vision - Issue Report

## Purpose

To provide the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board with an overview of the Social Assistance Vision and the implementation process to date.

## Background

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 staff received a [memo](#) announcing the provincial plan to support economic recovery and employment through a new recovery and renewal plan for social assistance. Staff provided an update to the Board at the October 2020 meeting.

Building on what had been learned during the COVID-19 outbreak, and the need to fundamentally change ways of delivering services, the first phase of the social assistance recovery and renewal plan, was to be focused on four key areas:

1. **Accelerated digital delivery solutions**, including the launch of a new and easy-to-use Social Assistance Digital Application and expansion of the My Benefits digital platform to improve access for people receiving social assistance and allow two-way digital messaging between clients and caseworkers.
2. **Centralized and automated delivery**, beginning with centralized intake pilots across several municipalities and centralization of benefits in several ODSP offices that reduce paperwork, giving caseworkers more time to support clients through crisis and helping them get back to work. Centralized benefits processing for participating ODSP sites began November 23, 2020. The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB will be phased in beginning June 21, 2021.

The pilot phase will allow the Ministry to test the centralized and automated risk-based intake process with a limited number of users before expanding roll-out to include additional locations and programs. The Ministry will be

consistently engaged with pilot locations to gather feedback, identify necessary changes, and test new features and enhancements.

3. **Risk-based eligibility review**, to be developed alongside the centralized intake pilots, that uses provincial, federal, and third-party sources to make financial assistance processing faster, while strengthening program integrity.
  - Using a risk-based algorithm developed in collaboration with the municipal service delivery partners, low and medium-risk applications can be auto-granted through SAMS technology.
  - Higher risk cases will be passed to municipalities and DSSABs for determination. As this is a prototype, there will be ongoing testing of the model, and we will adjust where necessary.
4. **Access to employment and training**, partnering with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to support people to get back to work, including people with disabilities who have been particularly hard hit by job losses during the COVID-19 outbreak.

On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 staff received a [memo](#) announcing [Ontario's New Vision for Social Assistance](#). The vision statement is: *"To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence."*

The provincial government, in partnership with municipal governments and DSSABs, is taking steps to implement the new vision for Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal. This will involve a significant functional realignment of the provincial and municipal delivery roles.

The communication also included an [infographic](#) and a [question and answer](#) document further explaining the provincial vision.

Upon receipt of Ontario's New Vision for Social Assistance a session was held with Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB staff to review the information provided by the province. In addition to the staff session, an update was provided at the February board meeting.

A new division of labour will see the province assuming primary responsibility for the financial assistance administration function. Municipal governments will focus frontline caseworkers to work with people to meet their life stabilization needs and help them navigate community and health services available to them.

Employment services will be delivered by third party service system managers through the Employment Ontario network. Changes to social assistance will be phased in between 2022 and 2024.

On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 staff received a [memo](#) advising of proposed amendments to the to the Ontario Works Act, 1997, within the Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021.

At the April Board meeting staff provided an update of the proposed amendments which if passed would:

- Enable further codesign and re-alignment testing of Ontario Works functions among municipalities, District Social Service Administration Boards, and the Ministry in support of the new delivery model; and,
- Support the vision's enhanced focus on life stabilization to enable people in receipt of social assistance to achieve greater independence and financial resilience.

The amendments being proposed are a key first step towards a new social assistance delivery model that takes a person-centered approach to human services. This approach has 'results for people' at its core.

In late April, staff started to receive training with respect to Centralized Intake, as mentioned above the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB will be phased on June 21, 2021. In addition to training, local processes are being developed with respect to Social Assistance applications and inquiries. More updates will be provided as staff become fully trained and local processes are finalized. This is the first step in moving towards the new division of labour with the province focusing on financial assistance administration and municipal partners focusing on person centered services including navigating employment supports, community and health services.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, staff received a communication from the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) asking that we engage with staff regarding the Social Assistance Vision. Staff engagement tools were provided, and a response was requested on or before May 25<sup>th</sup>. A staff session was held immediately to discuss the staff engagement process, a survey was developed, which all staff were asked to complete then a follow up session was held with staff to review the results. Once the sessions were complete a summary report was prepared and sent to OMSSA.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) is in a great position to leverage the integration of all programs to deliver a person-centered casework approach within the new Social Assistance vision. Staff have extensive knowledge of local community supports and the activities that support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB has strong partnerships with local service providers such as Employment Ontario (where we do not provide this service ourselves), Canadian Mental Health Association, Child Care Providers, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, Non-Profit Community Housing Providers, Family Health Teams. Effective community partnerships ensure that if referrals are required, the right ones are made.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, staff received a [briefing note](#) prepared by the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO) regarding the new vision for Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal, specifically changes to the municipal delivery role. Staff provided an update to the Board regarding the briefing note prepared by AMO at the May Board meeting.

AMO is supportive of the proposed transformation with the right conditions in place and is committed to working to co-design the new social assistance program.

### **Financial Impact**

Considering the new realignment of roles and responsibilities, a new funding formula for Ontario Works program administration will be developed. Under the legislative amendments, changes to the current 50-50 program administration cost-sharing are not proposed.

The Province will continue to pay 100% for the cost of income support benefits. The Province, municipalities, and DSSABs will co-design a new funding and accountability model as part of new social assistance program design.

### **Conclusion**

The province's new social assistance vision aligns with the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's integrated approach as our staff have in-depth knowledge of all DSB programs and local community programs to help support life stabilization for the client.

Through the process of integration, we have realigned many functions internally and have already streamlined our services so that our clients can receive the best customer service when they are most vulnerable.

With a variety of services to choose from, clients are well supported holistically, resulting in life stabilization. Supports are aligned with their needs while they receive wrap around services. Prioritizing access to mental health and addictions supports will enhance life stabilization.

Moving forward communication between provincial and municipal staff will be key to ensure positive client outcomes. Clients, community partners and staff will need to fully understand the system to ensure seamless services. A no wrong door approach, accompanied by minimal warm transfers/hand-offs will be critical to client engagement.

Staff will continue to update the Board regarding implementation of the Social Assistance Vision.