Report To:	Program Planning Committee
From:	Donna Stewart, Director of Integrated Social Services and Amy Winnington-Ingram, Community Housing Program Supervisor
Date:	February 26, 2020
Re:	Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit – Issue Report

Purpose:

To provide the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB Program Planning Committee with an update of the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) which will launch on April 1, 2020.

Background:

At the November 27, 2019 board meeting, staff presented the Direct Shelter Subsidy (DSS) - Issue Report which analyzed the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's current program. The DSB's current program has many advantages which include:

- DSB DSS benefit considers all shelter expenses rent heat & utilities; and
- DSB DSS benefit uses the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's market rent allowing more people to qualify; and
- 47% of clients that left the DSS program were not accessing social assistance which has significant long-term savings; and
- DSB DSS benefit reduces the overall cost factor by eliminating the need for ongoing operating dollars that are a requirement of having bricks and mortar.

In that report, staff were also able to show that if the province's new Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program was being applied to all the DSB's current DSS clients receiving the benefit, 70% of them would not qualify for the program.

On February 12, 2020, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing released the new Canada Ontario Housing Benefit guidelines.

All the assumptions reported by staff on how the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit would be calculated and administered were correct. **There is no flexibility for Service Managers** to flow the COHB annual funding allocation to their own DSS funds or to calculate it in a way that makes sense for the communities that we serve.

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The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit `will provide up to the following amounts to assist households approved in the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board's service area for the first two fiscal years:

- **2020-21: $70,534**
- **2021-22: $21,866**

The DSB staff as well as our Board Chair met with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Steve Clark, in January to advocate to the province to allow local flexibility as a one size fits all does not work for the North. The DSB has proven that the DSB local Direct Shelter Subsidy program works in getting clients off social assistance, creates financial independence and saves all tax payors money.

Analysis

The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit calculation is based on the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Average Market Rent (AMR) and not the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB's Market Rent. In the table below, it clearly demonstrates that the gap is quite large between CMHC's Average Market Rent comparatively to the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB which means that less people will qualify.

	Average Market Rent			**80% of Average Market Rent (used to calculate COHB)**		
	CMHC	**DSB**	**Variance**	**CMHC**	**DSB**	**Variance**
One Bedroom	$678	$940	$262	$542	$752	$210
Two Bedroom	$915	$1,025	$110	$732	$820	$88
Three Bedroom	$993	$1,105	$112	$794	$884	$90

Using the province's COHB calculation,

- Single person (or couple) in a **one-bedroom apartment** earning **more than $21,700 will not qualify for the COHB.**

- Sole support or couple with a child renting a **two-bedroom apartment,** earning **more than $29,300 will not qualify for the benefit**

- Sole support or couple with children renting a **three-bedroom apartment**, earning **more than $31,775 will not qualify.**

Conclusion

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB will work with single clients who are receiving social assistance. For those who do not qualify for the Direct Shelter Subsidy (due to the gap between the maximum shelter allowance through Ontario Works and their actual shelter costs) to apply for the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit. This clientele makes less than $21,700 a year and would likely qualify for the COHB.

Staff will administer the COHB program and will continue to lobby to the government the benefits of our local DSS program.

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