

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Questions and Answers – Social Services Relief Fund

1. What is the Social Services Relief Fund?

The Social Services Relief Fund (the “Fund”) is a new, \$200 million investment by the Ontario government in fiscal 2020-21 to help protect the health and safety of the province’s most vulnerable people, through assistance to individuals and to frontline agencies.

This Fund was announced on March 23, 2020 and is a shared initiative between the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Both ministries are working together so that municipalities and social services organizations have the funding and flexibility they need to respond to local needs.

The Fund includes two streams:

- 1) \$148 million in block funding provided to Service Managers to support municipalities and organizations that administer social services in their response to the COVID-19 crisis (administered by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing); and
- 2) \$52 million to individuals for those in financial crisis with no access to other supports, and those currently on social assistance requiring additional resources (administered by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and delivery partners).

2. How will payments be made to Service Managers?

The \$148 million investment administered by MMAH in fiscal 2020-21 will be provided through the existing Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Service Agreement and funding will flow through the existing program guidelines and reporting structures. This will ensure that the provincial investment is delivered as quickly as possible and with the maximum flexibility to respond to local needs. Expanded funding is intended to support Service Managers in supporting a range of vulnerable populations, including people living in community housing, supportive housing, people with low incomes, social assistance recipients, or others who require social services support as well as those that are experiencing homelessness.

Service Managers can expect to receive 50 per cent of their Social Services Relief Fund allocation in April 2020. A further 25 per cent will flow to Service Managers in early July 2020. Payments for subsequent quarters will be based on projected and actual expenditures.

Consistent with the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, quarterly payments will be provided to Service Managers through the Transfer Payment Ontario (TPON) system.

3. What can this funding be used for?

The \$148 million in funding is being provided to Service Managers through the existing Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative to ensure that this new investment can be used for all types of social and housing services.

However, the ministry expects Service Managers will support municipalities and social service providers such as shelters, food banks, emergency services, charities and non-profits continue to deliver their critical services, hire additional staff, and find ways to promote social distancing and self-isolation to keep clients safe and healthy. As well, Service Managers are encouraged to consider Indigenous homeless shelters and Indigenous organizations to ensure Indigenous peoples are supported through this difficult time.

For example, in the homeless service system, this funding could be used towards initiatives like:

- Building homeless shelter capacity (not including capital expenditures);
- Use of motels or hotels;
- Housing allowances;
- Transportation costs;
- Food and supplies;
- Enhanced cleaning services;
- Non-medical staffing requirements (e.g., enhanced outreach services); and
- Protective equipment.

As an illustration, in community housing and supportive housing, this funding could be used towards initiatives like:

- Housing allowances for in-situ tenants;
- Food and supplies for households in quarantine and/or isolation;
- Non-medical staffing requirements; and
- Protective equipment.

More broadly, this funding could be used towards initiatives delivered through local service agencies like:

- Food banks and grocery gift cards
- Community outreach to support seniors in self-isolation
- Recruitment and coordination of volunteers
- Transportation for low-income individuals to get to and from medical appointments

Other examples of eligible use of funds could include funding for utility or rental arrears (e.g., rent bank programs).

4. Will an Investment Plan be required for the additional funding? How will Service Managers report on spending?

No, the ministry will not require an Investment Plan to flow this additional funding.

To enable immediate payments to Service Managers, the requirements set out in the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative program guidelines will be modified for the additional funding under the Social Services Relief Fund. Rather than an Investment Plan, the ministry will require Service Managers to report their actual Q1 expenditures under the four spending categories and administration fees, and projected Q2 – Q4 spending through a report back due on or before July 15, 2020.

Please note that no changes in reporting will be made for base funding under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative and this spending will continue to be reported in the normal fashion.

5. Can funding be used to cover unforeseen eligible expenses incurred late in the 2019-20 fiscal year to support vulnerable households as a result of COVID-19?

Yes. The ministry recognizes the extraordinary impact of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis which has increased demands on housing and homelessness-related services late in the 2019-20 fiscal year. Funding provided under the Social Services Relief Fund may be used to offset eligible costs incurred on or after March 1, 2020.

6. Will funding for additional staff members be counted towards a Service Manager's program administration costs?

Under the program guidelines for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, Service Managers may use up to 10 per cent of their annual allocation for program administration costs. Program administration costs may include costs for staff involved in the planning and administration of the program. It is expected that Service Managers ensure that program administration funds are used efficiently.

However, costs for staff who directly deliver services to clients are not considered administration costs under the program guidelines. These costs are instead considered eligible program costs and may be reported as such.

7. Does a signed agreement need to be in place before money can flow?

The Ministry will flow funding under the existing CHPI Services Agreement. A sign back of the allocation letter acknowledging the funding allocation and terms and conditions will be required but is not conditional on payments flowing to the Service Manager.

8. Is Council approval required to receive the additional funding? If so, how is this acquired if Council's are no longer meeting?

The appropriate authority is required to sign the allocation letter; the flowing of payments to Service Managers is not conditional on this signature.

9. How long will the funding continue for?

The new funding is for the 2020-2021 fiscal year and we will allow expenses incurred in March 2020 to be applied against the allocation.

10. What is the expectation for individuals and families requesting rental support, that they access OW/EI first before accessing housing assistance?

The expectation is entirely at the discretion of the Service Manager. If they want to help the individual or family outright, they have that flexibility.

11. Can Social Services Relief Fund funding be stacked with eligible Reaching Home funding?

Yes, the Social Services Relief Fund funding can be stacked, but funding under the Reaching Home program will come with its own rules determined by the federal government.