

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal
Questions and Answers for Stakeholders and Partners

General

1. Why does the social assistance system in Ontario require transformation?

The COVID-19 outbreak has shown us a new approach is needed now more than ever - more Ontarians are looking to us for help with basic needs, to stabilize their family's lives, and to get back to work and financial security. Now is the time to build on the learnings from COVID-19 and work to fundamentally change how we deliver services.

Ontario finds itself at a critical juncture, with uncertainties about what economic recovery will look like for our most vulnerable. Ontario's social assistance system must be ready to focus on supporting people back into towards employment, independence and stability.

The new vision for social assistance aims to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, connecting them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success. It is a critical enabler to a whole-of-government approach to accessing human services that will not only help more people succeed in employment, but also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education. The pandemic has caused a protracted economic downturn and for some, a longer than expected absence from employment and as such, it will take an all of system approach to achieve economic recovery and supporting people back into jobs. That is why we need to act now and accelerate work towards this critical transformation to support Ontario's economic recovery.

2. What will the roles of the province, and municipalities and DSSABs be in the new vision?

At the core of this plan is a new delivery model for social assistance that looks at provincial and municipal roles - not along the traditional program lines of Ontario Works and ODSP, but around who can best provide the service to get the best results.

The premise of the vision is for the province to automate, streamline and realign functions that are largely administrative (e.g., provision of financial assistance),

making it quick and easy for people to access the system while ensuring program integrity.

At the same time, municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centred casework and knowledge of local community supports to provide all of the activities that support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment.

We will start by exploring how to realign ‘who does what’, designing with our municipal partners a phased multi-year plan that will transform the delivery of social assistance in Ontario. Broad engagement, testing and prototyping, and appropriate phasing will be key.

3. Why is there a focus on realigning provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities?

In the current state, we know that programs are hard to navigate, and many clients are unable to access the broader system of supports they need. By working with other ministries to build better connections between programs, Ontarians will better be able to access the supports they need.

We envision a human services model where:

- people can access support to stabilize their lives before and after someone qualifies for social assistance
- supports across the system are better aligned and integrated where possible
- social assistance is just one of many tools available to help people improve their quality of life

This system will allow caseworkers to focus on results for people, rather than on paperwork, helping those people who can get back to work and support the Province’s economic recovery.

The changes will support us achieving this vision by allowing the province to leverage its ability to provide a consistent, efficient, cost-effective, and technology-based administrative system. It will also allow municipalities and DSSABs to leverage in-depth knowledge of local communities to help build a life stabilization framework that works at the local level.

This builds on our continued focus on the integrity and sustainability of social assistance programs. By specializing based on function rather than program, we increase the efficiency, integrity and effectiveness of the overall system and free up

space to enable us to provide the level of service people need to make a difference in their lives.

4. How will other ministries be involved in this process?

Work is underway with other ministries to build better connections between programs so Ontarians can access the supports they need. Taking a whole-of-government approach will not only help more people succeed in employment, it will also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education.

We will work across government to engage partner ministries to collaborate and align on pieces of this work.

5. Where and when are these changes taking effect?

These changes will take effect over the next several years in phases.

We are working with municipalities and DSSABs to co-design and implement a plan that will gradually transform the delivery of social assistance across Ontario, beginning with co-designing a new operation model and consolidating financial assistance.

In general, 2021 and 2022 will be largely “learning and testing years,” as multiple projects are being prototyped, iterated and evaluated starting with a small sample of local offices and gradually expanding into more offices.

By the end of 2022, we hope to have reached full consolidation of financial assistance, and by 2024, we hope to begin rolling out a new human services model.

6. How will municipalities and DSSABs deliver life stabilization supports?

As the ministry seeks to improve client outcomes and relieve administrative burden for local office staff, life stabilization will become the foundational and measurable component of supporting a client’s progress towards employment.

The province, municipalities and community at large must all work together to help stabilize people’s lives and better employment outcomes for those who need help. The new vision is a starting point for further discussion among all sectors. The Province will continue to work with our municipal and DSSAB partners to engage with clients, staff, the community and those who will be an essential part of this transformation.

The province has been working with municipalities and DSSABs to develop a life stabilization framework and to work through what supports and changes are needed

and how we will continue to support clients to help them prepare for participation in employment activities.

7. Given the current COVID-19 emergency, why isn't the government raising social assistance rates?

The amount of financial assistance a person may be entitled to will depend on their individual circumstances including their income, expenses and family composition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has made significant additional investments through the Social Services Relief Fund, so that shelters, food banks, charities, non-profits and municipalities will have access to flexible funding to help cope with growing demands and extraordinary circumstances.

We are working with our municipal partners on developing a social assistance system that is modern, sustainable, and connects people to the supports they need to help them on a path to greater independence and employment. Our plan will see people on social assistance achieve independence and financial resilience through a network of supports that are right for them and their communities.

It's a long road ahead and we continue to build on the work we are doing to transform employment services in Ontario, streamline processes to make it easier for people to connect to the services they need, and refocus the efforts of caseworkers to provide one-on-one help to those who need it in this difficult time.

8. Are ODSP and Ontario Works being merged into one program?

No, the ministry is not combining the Ontario Works and ODSP programs. These programs remain distinct programs with different policy objectives. We are realigning the work that is done in both programs along functional lines to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Ontario Works

9. How was this vision developed?

Municipal and district partners, such as the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto, have been key partners in the development of this work and will continue to be engaged, along with other stakeholders and partners, as this work moves forward.

This new vision builds on the conversations that have been ongoing at various tables with municipal and DSSAB partners for a number years and learnings from previous reform plans and efforts, as well research in this sector including the Lankin and

Sheikh 2012 Report to MCCSS by the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: [Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario](#) and the more recent Maytree [Report on System Transformation in Ontario Works](#). Both of these reports focus on the importance of aligning and integrating human services around locally delivered services and a person-centred approach.

The new vision for social assistance also takes into consideration the recommendations from the Auditor General, which highlighted the need to focus administration and strengthened program integrity.

While this plan identifies a path forward, it is the start of collaboration, not the end. The Province will continue to work closely with its municipal delivery partners – and with others – to refine the plan to create a better system for Ontarians.

10. What is in scope for co-design and who will be engaged?

We are committed to working collaboratively to co-design throughout the transformation process. Leveraging the capacity and expertise of the province and municipalities and DSSABs is central to developing a system that meets the needs of social assistance clients.

The co-design process will focus on developing a new operating model for social assistance, including roles and processes, the new human services approach, and funding, performance and accountability frameworks.

Representatives from across the social assistance and human services sector in Ontario will all have a role to play in the co-design process. This includes municipalities and DSSABs, partners across the provincial government, frontline staff, client groups, community organizations, disability organizations, urban Indigenous partners and other key partners.

As we consider the broader human services system and navigation of services to support life stabilization, sectors beyond social assistance will also be included as necessary (e.g., housing, child-care, mental health and addictions).

11. How will municipalities be engaged on co-design and implementation?

The Province will work with municipalities and DSSABs to set the stage for system transformation that drives outcomes, accountability and system performance.

This work will take place through channels such as the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee (PMSAEC), PMSAEC subcommittees and the Provincial Municipal Human Services Collaborative (PMHSC). PMHSC will be a forum to share information and receive early input from

municipal and DSSAB partners into the design process. PMSAEC is working to refine a detailed co-design plan that will provide clarity as to how different delivery partners and stakeholders will be able to participate.

We are committed to prototyping as much as possible, and the evidence from these prototypes will inform how we proceed as we work together to transform the social assistance system. Municipalities and DSSABs will also be involved in prototyping a range of initiatives including the Employment Services Transformation and centralized intake prototypes that are already underway.

12. Do these plans apply to First Nations Ontario Works delivery partners?

No. In recognition of their unique needs and priorities, the province will work with First Nations delivery partners, including at the MCCSS-First Nations Joint Social Services Table on a separate plan to renew social assistance in First Nations communities.

13. How will Ontario Works applicants and clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed, and we will utilize the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

The province will work closely with municipalities and DSSABs at the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance Employment Committee to plan communications in a coordinated and aligned way.

14. How do these changes fit with the Employment Services Transformation in Ontario Works prototype offices?

The new vision for social assistance builds on work that is currently underway to transform employment services in Ontario, starting with three prototype sites.

In the prototype sites, municipalities are now focused on life stabilization activities, and these prototypes will help inform how life stabilization is delivered.

15. When will EST be rolled out province-wide? When will municipalities and DSSABs be informed?

EST is currently in the prototyping phase as MTLSD monitors and evaluates the prototypes. Lessons learned from the prototype regions will be applied to the future roll-out across the province.

Once timelines for full provincial implementation have been established, they will be communicated with to partners and stakeholders. The ministry remains committed to providing regular communications to help our partners and stakeholders understand and prepare for any changes.

16. Will funding for municipal and district delivery agents be affected?

As transformation of both employment services and social assistance delivery proceeds, the funding model will evolve alongside the shifts in roles and responsibilities.

The co-designed system will include a new approach to funding and a new performance and accountability framework. The province and municipalities will work together to develop a funding approach that addresses administrative costs appropriately and realigns any municipal and provincial savings.

17. Who should municipalities and DSSABs contact if they have questions or concerns?

For program-specific questions, please contact your program supervisor.

Ontario Disability Support Program

18. How will this vision affect people with disabilities?

Streamlining and automating financial assistance and expanding digital and self-serve options will allow us to redirect resources to provide more life stabilization supports to people with disabilities. The new vision for the social assistance system where municipalities deliver life stabilization supports has the potential to provide a significant benefit to Ontarians with disabilities.

There is no immediate impact to the way ODSP clients access services, except for previously announced life stabilization supports being prototyped in the Employment Services Transformation (EST) prototype sites.

19. How will ODSP clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed. We will also use the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

To support further communication, we will also work with municipal service managers to share information and resources with community services agencies and networks.

20. How will this impact ODSP local offices and their staff?

Today's announcement is introducing the long-term vision for social assistance transformation, that will happen in phases, taking place over several years. There are no immediate changes within ODSP or to the way clients currently access ODSP.