



Report To:	Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB
From:	Donna Moroso, Director of Integrated Social Services and Gilles Plouffe, Ontario Works Program Supervisor
Date:	February 23, 2012
Re:	Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the DSB Board Members with an update on the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario which has been a work in progress for over a year.

Background

In the 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy, Ontario committed to reviewing social assistance with a focus on removing barriers and increasing opportunities for people to work.

In January 2010, Ontario appointed the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (SARAC) to provide advice on a proposed scope for the review. SARAC's June 2010 report recommended a broad review of Ontario's income security system, including social assistance, income security, employment supports, and related services for working-age adults.

The announcement made on November 30, 2010 builds on SARAC's recommendations, with the review commission expected to create a "concrete action plan" to reform Ontario's social assistance system. The scope of the review will be to examine the current social assistance system and understand its relationship with other federal, provincial and municipal income security programs.

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario released its second discussion paper on February 3rd, 2012. The paper, entitled [*Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform*](#), is accompanied by [*What We Heard: A Summary of Discussion on Social Assistance*](#), a document summarizing the input they received in response to their first "[*Issues and Ideas*](#)" document that was released in June 2011.

Objectives

Approaches for Reform is organized according to the review's five stated outcomes. An additional chapter is provided relating issues for First Nations. The paper also poses for discussion much more specific and detailed questions than the first paper did.

The timeline for this current phase of discussion and input is March 16, 2012. During this time, the Commission has been clear that they are focused on practical solutions, including implementation issues and ideas to overcome barriers to successful implementation.

OMSSA's Summary of the discussion paper

The paper identifies four key features of **effective services and supports** for people receiving social assistance:

- consistent assessment and case management;
- integrated pre- and post-employment services and supports;
- access to the same level of services for people with disabilities; and
- strong connections with employers.

Underpinning these features is the need to be able to effectively access these employment services and supports, with an emphasis on increasing coordination or integration in order to be more effective. The paper identifies three potential approaches:

- improved provincial-municipal/First Nations collaboration;
- municipalities/First Nations deliver all employment services; or
- Employment Ontario delivers all employment services.

In this area, the Commission wants to continue discussion on whether Ontario should adopt a means to better assess work capacity and set participation requirements for people with some capacity for employment, or whether the province should wait to introduce such requirements until substantial progress has been made on removing barriers to employment for people with disabilities, including the full implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Under the discussion of an **appropriate benefit structure** for social assistance, the paper notes that many trade-offs must be considered. It states that to arrive at a rate structure an adequacy measure, reference wage and benefit withdrawal rate must all be considered. The paper notes that the trade-offs are even more pronounced in designing a benefit structure for people with disabilities. Several approaches are highlighted to possibly address trade-offs including:

- extended health benefits for all low-income Ontarians;
 - varying the rate structure over time;

- universal income-tested benefits such as:
 - an earned income supplement; and
 - a housing benefit.

The **complexity of the current benefit** structure and method of calculating benefits is also addressed. The Commission suggests that benefit calculation should reflect actual costs and that complexity might be reduced through one or more of the following elements:

- combining basic needs and shelter (or board and lodging) into one standard rate for adults reflecting regional variation;
- eliminating the category of “dependent adult” with adults applying separately for benefits
- merging some special benefits into the standard rate.

The report speaks to tensions between the desire to ensure “compliance” and the time consuming nature of the verification process. It mentions an audit based process of verification as a possible approach that would be less time-consuming for staff and invasive for clients.

In its discussion of the treatment of assets, the Commission notes a number of possible approaches including:

- for OW asset limits to match ODSP;
- increase asset limits for an initial period of time when someone first receives benefits;
- limits on longer term assets intended to create financial security - such as RRSPs - could be raised;
- limits should reflect realities of First Nations and Northern life that may require equipment to hunt or for cultural purposes.

The Commission was also charged with making recommendations regarding **long-term viability of the system**. The paper lays out three possible approaches to improving integration and service delivery to ensure long-term viability.

- continue current model of separate delivery of OW and ODSP, but integrate employment services and supports for everyone receiving social assistance
- provide employment services and income support through a one-stop delivery model that would integrate OW and ODSP at the local level
- for municipalities to deliver human services components of social assistance including case management and employment services while the Province delivers administrative services such as issuing cheques.

The paper raises the question of whether it may be better to move responsibility for Temporary Care Assistance and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

The Commission's paper highlights the interconnections between varieties of programs outside of social assistance that together are intended to provide economic security for Ontarians. The rules are collectively complex and often produce contradictory results for the people they are intended to help. One specific rule mentioned is the interaction between rent scales for Rent Geared to Income Housing and social assistance.

The Commission outlines its consultations with First Nations communities across Ontario. The report highlights a number of recommendations laid out by the Ontario Native Welfare Administrators Association (ONWAA) which emphasize a central role for First Nations people in designing, running and delivering programs for themselves. The paper notes a number of issues unique to First Nations and Northern communities including high costs of living and a lack of job opportunities in some areas.

To view the entire [OMSSA Quick Connect – Review of Social Assistance](#)

Conclusion

The report demonstrates an understanding of the more complex and interconnected context in which social assistance sits: their recognition that some of the solutions lay outside the social assistance system itself, including the inter-play with other areas such as housing and child care, and that their final report will speak to these too; that the recommendations they will be formulating over the coming months will be for a system that is sustainable for the future; and their emphasis in many parts on integration as a way forward – be it for service delivery, program development or client-experience.

Finally, it is important to note that this is truly a document to further and deepen the dialogue around the Commission's work. Conversations with the Commission have confirmed that no decisions have been made and that input will help shape their final report which is due in June 2012.

The Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB, along with the other 47 CMSM/DSSAB's, will continue to participate in this review through its representation on the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and their partnership with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO). Staff will continue to provide the Board with regular updates as they are available.