



Report To:	Program Planning Committee
From:	Donna Moroso, Director of Integrated Social Services and Gilles Plouffe, Ontario Works Program Supervisor
Date:	June 27, 2012
Re:	Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits Policy

## **REPORT**

### **Purpose**

Staff is requesting Board approval for a revision to DSB's Ontario Works Policy [7B.1 Discretionary Benefits Overview](#). The change in this policy allows staff to deny Discretionary Benefits requests that would qualify under the policy but are unable to approve as we have met or exceeded the provincial maximum on Discretionary Benefits. This change in policy is required as the new provincial cap on Discretionary Benefits will take effect July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

### **Background**

#### **Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits**

Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB 2011 Calendar Year Expenditures

Health Related Benefits:	\$ 86,543
Non- Health Related Benefits:	\$ 60,491
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$147,034</b>

The existing formula of \$8.75 per case for non-health related Discretionary Benefits would be replaced with a new formula of \$10 per case on combined health and non-health related Discretionary Benefits effective July 1, 2012.

**Health related Discretionary Benefits include:**

- dental care for adults and dependent adults on Ontario Works and dependent adults of ODSP clients;
- eye-glasses for adults and dependent adults on Ontario Works and dependent adults of ODSP clients;
- a portion of the costs of prosthetic appliances;
- funerals and burials; and
- any other special service, item, or payment authorized by the Director of Ontario Works (e.g. child care costs in situations where a recipient requires child care to attend a medical appointment).

**Non-health related Discretionary Benefits include:**

- vocational training and retraining;
- travel and transportation that is not for health-related purposes;
- moving expenses; and
- any other special service, item or payment authorized by the Director of Ontario Works

Based on our early analysis of these new rules the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB will have an annual allocation of approximately \$145,000 for health and non-health related Discretionary Benefits effective July 1, 2012. Since our expenditures for 2011 were \$147,034, we may be able to manage within the new allocation.

However, the elimination of the Community Start-up & Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) on January 1, 2013 will put a lot of pressure on the Discretionary Benefits allocation. Based on the figures provided by Ministry of Community & Social Services, the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB spent \$284,615 on the CSUMB benefit over a 12 month period from April 2011 to March 2012.

**Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)**

CSUMB is a mandatory social assistance benefit that provides funding to eligible recipients to assist with the costs of:

- establishing a new residence
- preventing eviction or discontinuation of heating or utilities
- maintaining an existing residence

The CSUMB benefit is provided for:

- victims of family violence
- persons who are homeless
- persons who reside in uninhabitable premises (where the uninhabitable conditions are not clearly evident, verification is sought from a third party, e.g., a building or health inspector or physician)

- persons leaving a residence due to:
  - incapacity or death of a supporting care-giver/family member(s);
  - overcrowding within the premises;
  - documented need for children and sole-support parents to relocate;
  - eviction from the premises;
  - employment or training; or
  - a move to more affordable accommodations, where the applicant or recipient was experiencing undue hardship because of extreme shelter costs.
  
- persons being discharged from institutions such as:
  - correctional facilities;
  - hospitals;
  - hostels;
  - long-term care homes;
  - special care homes; or
  - interval and transition homes.

All Ontario Works and ODSP clients may be eligible to access CSUMB which provides up to a maximum of \$1,500 for recipients with one or more dependent children in a 24 month period; or up to a maximum of \$799 where there are no dependent children in a 24 month period.

The vast majority of the items covered by the CSUMB benefit are also eligible under Discretionary Benefits, so the items requested under CSUMB (\$284,615) will become requests that will be made under the Discretionary Benefits policy.

Obviously the \$145,000 provincial maximum on Discretionary Benefits will in no way absorb the CSUMB requests (\$284,615) that will come under Discretionary Benefits policy come January 1, 2013. This will mean that many requests for assistance which qualify under the Discretionary Benefits will need to be denied as staff try to live within the provincial maximum on Discretionary Benefits. The clients we serve will not be satisfied with the decision to deny benefits that qualify under the Discretionary Benefits policy, solely for the reason that the DSB has met or exceeded its monthly/quarterly provincial maximum on Discretionary Benefits.

Under the current Ontario Works legislation, recipients have the right to an internal review and an appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal (SBT) when Mandatory Benefits are denied. The same right of appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal does not exist for the denial of a Discretionary Benefit. However, when a recipient is not satisfied with any decision made by staff, they can request an internal review of the decision.

Staff will need to track and monitor this closely to ensure we do not exceed our provincial maximum. Any expenditure that exceeds the provincial maximum will not be cost shared by the province and will be a 100% municipal cost.

## **Objectives**

The Ministry has regulated the maximum amount that can be spent at \$10 per case effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 on combined health and non-health related Discretionary Benefits.

Staff will monitor the budget monthly to ensure that the DSB does not exceed the new yearly maximum of \$145,000 according to the new formula.

The review of the Manitoulin-Sudbury DSB Discretionary Benefits policies has begun and staff have prepared a brief summary of some possible options being considered. According to the past year's expenditures, the changes under consideration may result in annual savings of \$24,000 to the existing Discretionary Benefits expenditures. The Board needs to recognize that any savings attributed to changes in policy will be absorbed by the increased requests in January 2012 once the CSUMB benefit is eliminated by the province.

## **Conclusion**

At the present we are seeking Board approval to revise the DSB's Ontario Works Policy [7B.1 Discretionary Benefits Overview](#). The change in this policy allows staff to deny benefits request that would qualify under the policy but are unable to approve as we have met or exceeded the provincial maximum on discretionary benefits. This change in policy is required now as the new provincial maximum on Discretionary Benefits will take effect July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

DSB staff are currently reviewing the Ontario Works Discretionary Benefits policies and will be providing the Board with recommendations for changes in policy at the September 2012 Board meeting.