

To:	Warden Hicks and Members of Grey County Council
Committee Date:	March 25, 2021
Subject / Report No:	SSR-CW-03-21
Title:	Ontario's New Vision for Social Assistance
Prepared by:	Melissa McCulloch, Ontario Works Manager
Reviewed by:	Barb Fedy, Director
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	
Status:	Adopted as presented by Committee through Resolution CW63-21;

Recommendation

1. That Report **SSR-CW-03-21** regarding **Ontario's New Vision for Social Assistance** be received for information.

Executive Summary

On February 11th, 2021 the Ontario government announced significant changes to the social assistance system released in a paper, [Recovery & Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation](#). The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) is proposing significant changes to the municipal social assistance delivery role. The realignment outlines that the province will deliver centralized financial assistance for Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and municipalities will deliver life stabilization supports to both programs. The vision is to create a system that is more responsive to individual needs offering a range of integrated local services for housing, childcare, skills training, and mental health. Consultation with municipalities on the program design will occur over the coming months through the new Provincial-Municipal Human Services Collaborative Table.

Background and Discussion

As outlined in the November 12, 2020 report [Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Update](#) the province is accelerating plans to modernize social assistance to meet the needs of long-term recipients and to address the potential surge of new applicants when Covid-19 Federal benefits end. The new vision is proposing significant shifts in how service is provided to meet the needs of a rising caseload and decrease recidivism in the social assistance system. In the short term they are looking at co-designing a model where in summary:

The Province

- delivers intake services, centralized financial assistance, and benefits to Ontario Works and ODSP recipients
- automated, digital services and back-office functions

Municipalities

- delivers life stabilization services that include needs assessment, warm referrals, and discretionary benefits

The vision for the long-term is to shift to a system where municipalities provide integrated life stabilization supports to social assistance recipients, people in crisis and other municipal programs. The following diagram taken from [A Working Vision for Social Assistance](#) shows what the municipal role may look like with the client at the center of service planning:

Integrated client services:



Life Stabilization

Life stabilization services for Ontario Works and ODSP recipients will become the focus of Ontario Works staff while the province provides centralized intake, financial benefits and back end financial services to both programs. Municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centred casework and knowledge of local community supports to provide all the activities that support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment. This new 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.

These changes will take effect over the next several years in phases (see attached [A Working Vision for Social Assistance](#)). Years 2021 and 2022 will be largely the learning and testing years as multiple projects are being prototyped and evaluated. By the end of 2022, the province hopes to have reached full consolidation of financial assistance and by 2024 the new human services model will be in place.

Grey County Social Services is well positioned to adopt the next phase of this service delivery model. Reduced administration with a focus on life-stabilization has been a direction the department has been moving towards for the last 12-14 months. Specialized caseworker roles use a "wrap-round" model to provide pre-employment supports to clients with multiple barriers.

The department has also been early adopters of the provincial initiatives to reduce administration such as [MyBenefits](#) and Electronic Data Management.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

Changes to the Ontario Works Act and Ontario Disability Support Act will occur in 2021 to allow for broader system changes.

Financial and Resource Implications

The co-designed system will include a new approach to funding and a new performance and accountability framework. The province has indicated they will work together with municipalities to develop a funding approach that addresses administrative costs appropriately and re-invests administrative savings to enhance the system.

Relevant Consultation

- Internal
- External

Appendices and Attachments

[Recovery & Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation](#)

[Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Update](#)

[A Working Vision for Social Assistance](#)

[MyBenefits](#)