

To:	Chair Nielsen and Members of the Grey County Community Services Committee
Committee Date:	May 18, 2023
Subject / Report No:	CSR-CS-02-23
Title:	Employment Services Transformation Update
Prepared by:	Melissa McCulloch
Reviewed by:	Anne Marie Shaw
Lower Tier(s) Affected:	All
Status:	Recommendation adopted by Committee as presented per Resolution CW83-23; Endorsed by County Council July 22, 2023, per Resolution CC42-23.

Recommendation

1. That report **CSR-CS-02-23 regarding the Employment Services Transformation Update** be received for information.

Executive Summary

With Employment Services Transformation, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD), through Employment Ontario (EO), is now responsible for delivering employment and training services for Social Assistance recipients that was previously the responsibility of Ontario Works. Service System Managers (SSM) manage EO providers within each economic catchment region and co-ordinate with Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to ensure there is an Integrated Case Management (ICM) strategy in place. The attached Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Service System Manager (SSM) updates provide a summary of the progress of the SSM during the transition period to implementation April 1, 2023.

As a result of EST effective April 1st, 2023, Grey County Ontario Works will no longer provide employment support services or employment related benefits and will refer a portion of clients after a comprehensive assessment to EO for services. Financial reductions and the shift to support clients in the areas of crisis and safety, health and life skills has resulted in service delivery model changes and an emphasis to build stronger partnerships locally.

Background and Discussion

Since its inception in 1997, Ontario Works has operated under the legislative framework to provide employment assistance and financial assistance to help people in temporary need. Recipients were required to participate in employment assistance activities as a condition of eligibility, unless eligible for deferral.

The following diagram taken from [A Working Vision for Social Assistance](#) shows the direction the province continues to move in and what the municipal role is moving towards with the client at the center of service planning:

Integrated client services:



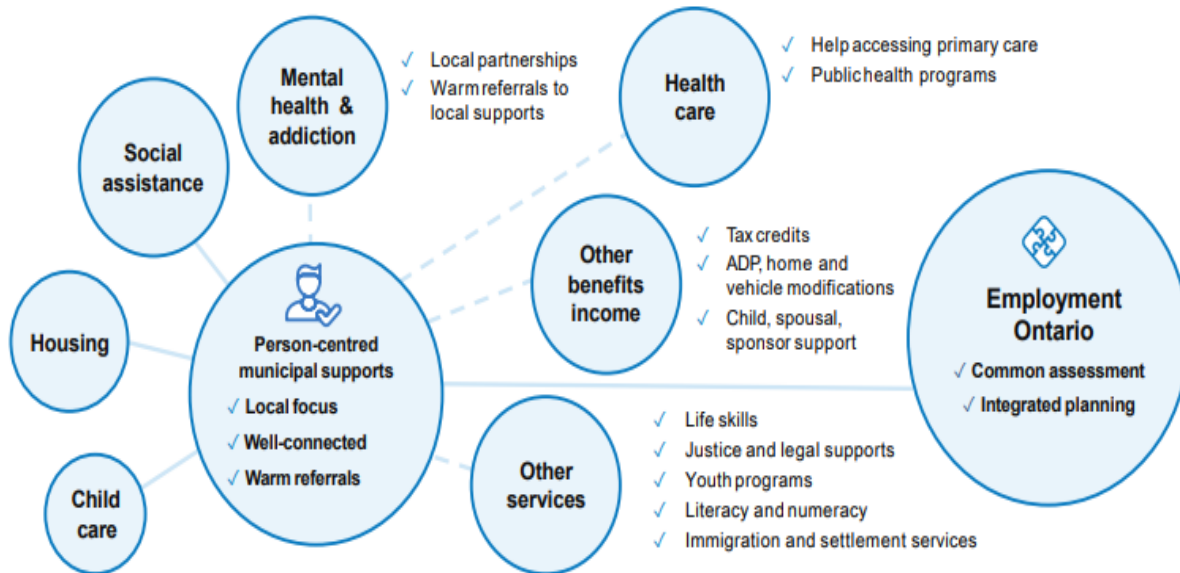
Effective April 1st, 2023, Ontario Works is responsible for delivering services that focus on connecting clients to stability supports, and to make referrals to EO when clients are ready. Caseworkers have been trained and are now actively using new tools to identify supports needed to stabilize and achieve greater independence. The following tools are mandated to be completed with all adult participants:

Common Assessment: a digital questionnaire accessed through SAMS and used across social assistance and employment services to support identification, assessment and planning for life stabilization and employment.

Mental Health and Addiction Screener: is a short tool designed to screen individuals quickly and accurately for possible mental health and/or substance use conditions. It may also be used as a tool to monitor changes over time in these areas. It is designed for use with general populations in diverse settings, and administration does not require training as a mental health professional. Clients may respond that they prefer not to answer.

Action Plan: a tool used to create and record a client’s individual plan towards life stabilization. It allows the caseworker to track the client’s goals, barriers, and community referrals related to their life stabilization needs.

After the initial assessment process, caseworker’s determine what area clients may need stability supports and/or make a referral to EO if they are job-ready or require pre-employment supports. Stability supports or Person-centred Supports are further defined as the following:



Caseworkers are then tasked to complete regular check-ins and follow-up with clients and progress is monitored through the Social Assistance Management System with reports available to track goals, activities, and referrals. Working towards a more integrated approach, caseworkers facilitate connections, referrals & follow up within Grey County such as the Short-term housing program, S.O.S and Children’s Services. Management and staff are building stronger connections with Mental Health Services & Addictions Services and working together to bridge areas that are under serviced or have wait-lists. Other key partners include Settlement Services, United Way, Safe & Sound, Family Health Teams, Adult Learning Centre, Georgian College, Grey Bruce Child and Family Services, Keystone, Women’s Centre Grey & Bruce, among other valued partners.

Transition planning has identified 2048 active cases (720 new intakes, 1238 ongoing OW, 90 non-disabled ODSP) that will need to be assessed over the course of 2023. 16 Caseworkers carrying caseloads averaging 90-100 cases, will stagger the assessments, follow-up, and check-ins along with managing financial supports (monthly benefits, annual reviews). It is a target of the department to refer 25% of clients to EO recognizing that a significant portion will require integrated case management.

As the province continues to move Ontario Works towards the Human Services Model system (see below [A Working Vision for Social Assistance](#)), success will involve continued policy change to simplify Ontario Works legislation and complex rules, streamlined administration with increased centralized capacity, so that staff can have more time to work with clients in a stability role and less time completing transactional tasks. Client outcomes will also be dependent on agency interdependencies and capacities as the system evolves.

Legal and Legislated Requirements

None.

Financial and Resource Implications

A portion of the provincial delivery funding allocation for Ontario Works was transferred to Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) Service System Managers.

- 2023 (April-Dec 2023) \$491,561 reduction
- 2024 (Jan-Dec 2024) \$655,415 reduction

The plan to absorb these costs has been managed through staffing reductions through attrition and some reduction of services as outlined in the 2023 budget package. The province continues to fund mandatory benefits at 100% while OW discretionary benefits are capped at \$10 per month of the combined OW and ODSP cases. Since 2018, OW Administration funding has been frozen except for specific one-time projects approved in the year. A new OW Administration funding model is expected to be announced later in 2023.

- Internal (list)
- External (list)

Appendices and Attachments

Consortium Member Council Information Report December 2022

Consortium Member Council Information Report March 2023

A Working Vision for Social Assistance

Background:

Counties of Bruce (lead), Grey, Huron, and the City of Stratford were selected as the Employment Service System Manager (SSM) for the Stratford – Bruce Peninsula Economic Region by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skill Development (MLITSD) as part of Ontario’s Employment Services Transformation in the Spring of 2022. The SSM is to build and implement a locally responsive employment services system that effectively meets the needs of a diverse range of job seekers and employers in the catchment area.

The Transfer Payment Agreement, approved by Bruce Council, and signed with the province provides \$12.28 million to serve 4,474 clients within the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula Economic Region per year until March 31, 2025; with a possible two-year extension. Councils have delegated authority to oversee this system to an Executive Steering Committee. This Steering Committee is made up of Economic Development Directors and Human Services Directors from each of the municipalities that make up the consortium.

The SSM provided an update on the activities of the SSM in September 2022 (included as an attachment to this report). In that update, details were provided on the establishment of the SSM governance structure, hiring of SSM staff, and the retention of expert support to conduct a current state network assessment.

Information Update:

Over the course of September to November 2022, the SSM has been engaged in a process to assess the current performance of the employment system in the Stratford to Bruce Peninsula catchment area and develop the strategy to strengthen the system starting in April 2023. Through this strategic planning experience, the SSM engaged community partners through the Executive Steering Committee, Service Provider Network, and Regional Advisory Committee to co-design the vision and strategy for the future state employment system in the areas. The following outlined the key findings and results of that process.

- **Current State Network Performance:** Through analysis of historical quantitative performance data, and qualitative narratives from service providers and community partners, the following actionable insights were developed to inform system design.
 - **Increased capacity to service clients at high risk for long-term unemployment:** There has been limited capacity development in the service provider network to serve the most at risk; this is a combination of a resourcing, design, and training challenge. The SSM will work to develop network capacity to focus on the most at risk.





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- **Focus on Employer Engagement, and Job Development and Retention:** There are inconsistent approaches to employer engagement and job development across the service provider network. The SSM will develop and implement a model of service delivery that builds consistency and capacity to develop these services.
- **Specialized Populations:** There is limited capacity across the service provider network to deliver services to those with specialized service needs (e.g, Indigenous peoples, those with disabilities, etc.). The SSM will work with the service provider network to develop capacity to address the diverse needs of people in the community.
- **Vision, Mission, and Values:** Based on the findings of the current state network assessment, and co-design with system partners, the SSM developed the following vision, mission, and values:
 - **Vision:** A community where all are supported, as whole persons, to achieve financial security, have meaningful work, and employers have access to incredible talent.
 - **Mission:** By collaborating with our partners, we manage a system that is responsive and exceeds expectations. We invest in our network to ensure its strength and sustainability.
 - **Values:**
 - **Hope:** We foster hope in every client, every time. Clients know they have reached someone that will help when they engage with our network.
 - **Client Centred:** We focus on the whole client. Aware of their life situation, past trauma, hopes, and strengths, we design individual approaches to meet the clients' goals.
 - **Inclusive & Accessible:** We welcome everyone. We also believe when all voices are involved, we are stronger together. Our network will ensure that programing is accessible and meets the needs of our diverse community.
 - **Collaboration:** We collaborate first. Our clients, partners, network, employers, and funders have the knowledge to drive meaningful outcomes for the community when they are engaged.
 - **Accountable:** We are outcomes focused. As government funded services, we ensure there is value in our investment, and positive impact in the community.
- **Strategic Pillars of Approach:** To address the findings of the current state network assessment and to deliver on the vision and mission, the SSM will undertake design and implementation work based on the following pillars:
 - **Integration of Supply & Demand Side Employment:** Through partnership, the SSM will integrate the needs of employers and job seekers to better address the gaps that exist between those looking to hire and those seeking work.





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- **Integration of Social Assistance:** The SSM is working closely with our Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program partners to develop referral pathways and an integrated case management approach that better supports Social Assistance recipients' success in gaining meaningful and sustainable employment.
- **Community Development:** The SSM is working with a broad range of community partners to co-design the future state employment service model to ensure that the system meets the needs of various stakeholders within the catchment area.
- **Evidence Based Accountability:** The SSM is integrating census, employment service, Social Assistance; labour market, and performance data to develop targets and funding model. This will result in a framework to ensure that network is creating outcomes for stakeholders and impact for the community.
- **Right Level of Service Right Away:** The future state service system will facilitate the referral of client to the right level of service right away. This will ensure that client motivation and goals are harnessed to successfully navigate the employment system to meaningful outcomes.

The SSM has prepared a report providing an initial overview of this strategy and detailed implementation approach and submitted for review by Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. This report was reviewed by the Service Provider Network and the Executive Steering Committee prior to its submission to the Ministry. The preparation and submission of this report is an important milestone during the transition phase (July 2022-March 2023) of the SSM.

Over the course of the Winter 2023, the SSM will continue to co-design the detailed implementation approach with our stakeholders. To date, there has been strong engagement and support of the strategic plan from our community stakeholders and service provider network.



Background:

The Counties of Bruce (lead), Grey, Huron, and the City of Stratford are the Employment Service System Manager (SSM) for the Stratford – Bruce Peninsula Economic Region. The SSM is to build and implement a locally responsive employment services system that effectively meets the needs of a diverse range of job seekers and employers in the catchment area. This report provides a brief information update on the activities of the SSM since the last report in February 2023.

Information Update:

The SSM has completed planning work to transition to the Integrated Employment Service Delivery (IESD) phase and started operating the new service delivery model on April 1, 2023. The following provides an overview of key components of work completed since February 2023:

- **Selection of New Services Providers:** Seven of eight existing Service Providers are continuing to provide employment services as part of the new delivery model. In addition to the seven providers, the SSM requested proposals to add providers with specialties in serving Indigenous individuals, Francophone Ontarians, and those with disabilities. The SSM is pleased to share that the Huronia Area Aboriginal Management Board, Southeast Grey Support Services, and College Boreal will become Service Providers under the new model.
- **New Case Management System:** The SSM is implementing a new case management system for employment services in the catchment area. The system reduces redundant data entry, increasing system capacity for client services. The system also allows the SSM to monitor the employment network for performance to ensure it is delivering value to the citizens of the catchment area.
- **Development of Detailed Program Guidelines:** The SSM developed detailed program guidelines that give direction to Services Providers on how to implement the new service delivery model in a manner that is consistent with the vision, mission, and values of the SSM. These have been reviewed by a third-party employment services expert to ensure effectiveness.
- **Learning Management System:** The SSM launched a learning management system to provide training to system staff to ensure professional development that results in positive client outcomes. Training includes motivational





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interviewing, employment readiness, job development, common assessment, and other orientation materials. The SSM has also ensured that staff are provided with Indigenous Cultural Competency training. These trainings help to ensure quality service is provided to clients.

- **Integrated Case Management Protocol:** The SSM has co-designed, with Service Providers and Social Assistance Partners, a protocol to ensure the effective case management of shared clients. This protocol focuses on a client-centred approach to supporting those on Ontario Work and the Ontario Disability Support Program to receive effective services that support them in obtaining employment.

As the SSM enters the Integrated Employment Service Delivery phase it will exit the phase of planning and will focus on ongoing operations, and continuous improvement. Future reporting will include progress toward obtaining program key performance indicators.



A working vision for social assistance

🔦 Vision:

To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence.

How we will realign:

🗺️ Province

Delivers:

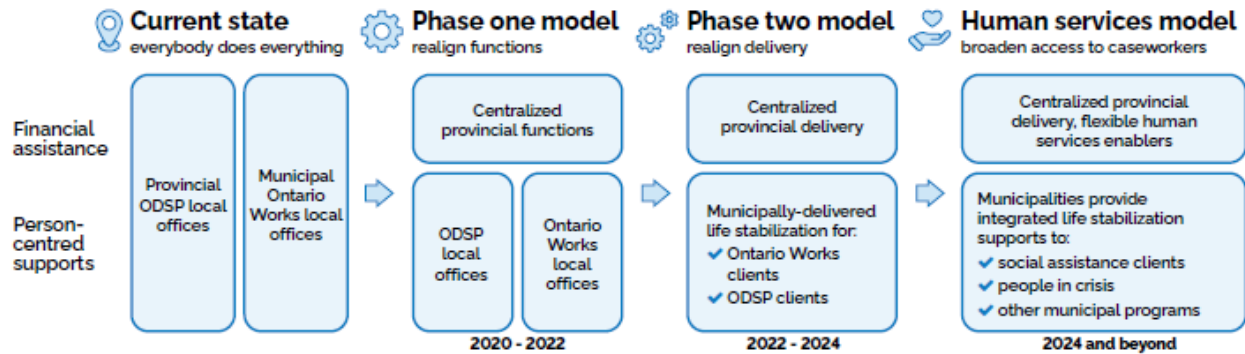
- ✓ Centralized financial assistance
- ✓ Financial controls and back-office functions suited to centralization or automation

🏢 Municipalities

Delivers:

- ✓ Life stabilization – including needs assessment, service planning, warm referrals, discretionary benefits
- ✓ Person-centred, connected supports, and navigation of broader system (e.g., housing, employment, mental health)

How we will evolve over time:



Integrated client services:

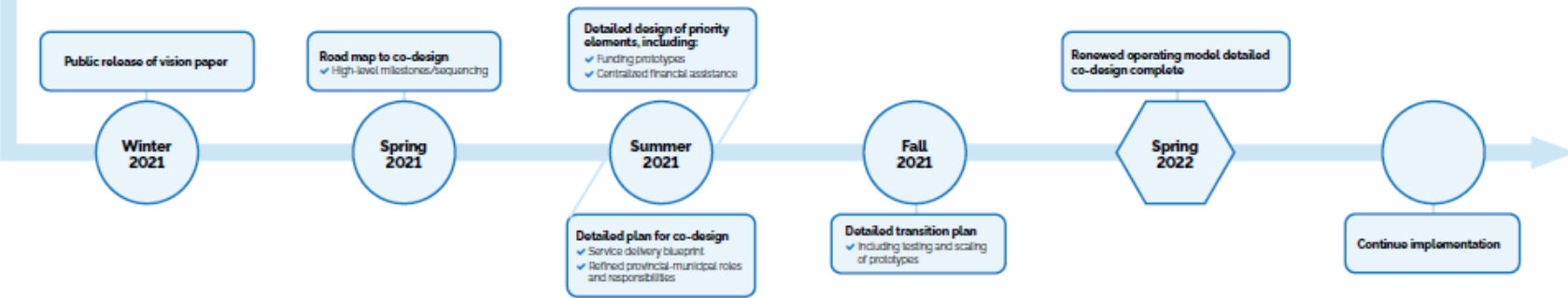


Social assistance: where we're headed

In the short term: co-designing a renewed operating model

Prototype and implement: developing centralized provincial functions, starting with intake, and tools and processes to support life stabilization

Co-design: engaging to design key operating model layers, provincial and municipal functions, principles and processes



In the long term: moving to a human services delivery model

- ✓ In the human services model, benefits like social assistance become "tools" in the caseworker toolbox, as opposed to the other way around
- ✓ Caseworkers are knowledgeable about the broader system of benefits and supports, and can guide people to the supports they need – whether Ontario Works or something else
- ✓ People seeking help are triaged by municipal caseworkers, supported as needed, and potentially diverted from social assistance

