



	REPORT No.: 2020-19
MEETING DATE: APRIL 16, 2020	DATE PREPARED: MARCH 30, 2020
SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES RELIEF FUND	

RECOMMENDATION

For information only.

REPORT SUMMARY

To provide The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB or the Board) with information regarding the Ontario Social Services Relief Fund.

BACKGROUND

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ontario announced a new, \$200 million Social Services Relief Fund. This is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS).

MCCSS is providing up to \$52 million province-wide to allow caseworkers to approve additional discretionary funding to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support clients for COVID-19 emergency related costs. In addition, the rules for Ontario Works Emergency Assistance have been changed to allow a longer eligibility period.

It should be noted that MCCSS has also provided some funding directly to Feed Ontario; an organization of which many food banks are members. Finally MCCSS has provided \$40 million through a COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund (CRRF) directly to organizations serving vulnerable populations.

The following would be eligible for CRRF:

- Children’s residential services, including residential programs for Complex Special Needs, Child Welfare, Youth Justice, out-of-home respite for children with physical and/or developmental disabilities, and children’s developmental services

- Gender-based violence residential programming, including Anti-Human Trafficking and Violence Against Women
- Indigenous Healing and Wellness Strategy residential programming
- Intervenor services
- Adult Developmental Services residential supports.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) made an investment of \$148 million provincially available to Service Managers under the new Social Services Relief Fund. This funding will flow to Service Managers under the existing Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) framework and will not require new contribution agreements or investment plans. This funding is in addition to the base 2020-21 CHPI allocation that MMAH previously communicated on April 17, 2019. There will be no change to the program administration or payment process for the regular payments under CHPI as a result of the new Social Services Relief Fund.

The Social Services Relief Fund will allow communities to expand a wide range of services and supports for vulnerable populations based on local need and will allow Service Managers to help a diverse range of vulnerable people in need in the community including people living in community housing or supportive housing, people with low incomes, social assistance recipients, or others who require social services support as well as those that are experiencing homelessness.

This investment complements additional resources provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (\$52 million) to directly support individuals and families in financial crisis who are not able to access federal assistance.

Under the Reaching Home program, the federal government is providing additional emergency relief funding to the two Community Entities that serve the City of Thunder Bay, the Lakehead Social Planning Council and the Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre. It is estimated that the emergency portion of those Reaching Home allocations are about \$600,000.

COMMENTS

Service Managers will have the flexibility to determine how best to use this funding to respond to the needs of vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic. Service Managers will determine local needs and distribute the funding, ensuring people are receiving the support they need.

Emergency Assistance (EA) through Ontario Works (OW) enables the immediate provision of financial assistance to an applicant in a crisis or emergency situation. The provision of financial assistance in an emergency may include an amount for basic needs, shelter and benefits. The Ministry has changed the provision of EA from not more than 16 days in 6 months to not more than 48 days not tied to 6 months in response to the COVID19 pandemic.

In order to effectively manage the influx of applications expected due to the COVID19 crisis, TBDSSAB has been completing applications for EA. EA enables the immediate provision of financial assistance to an applicant in a crisis or emergency situation. The provision of financial assistance in an emergency may include an amount for basic needs, shelter and benefits.

Applicants to OW apply for regular assistance. Once the caseworker assesses eligibility, a decision is made as to what type of assistance is issued. EA is issued for applicants who are pending EI or will potentially qualify for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

To April 9, 2020, 16 applications have been assessed as emergency and EA has been issued.

April 9, 2020, the Ministry launched an online application for emergency requests to OW. With the online application, requests for OW will be marked as emergency requests and the caseworker will not have to assess for type of application.

In March the Ministry also announced additional funding through OW Discretionary Benefits to assist with extraordinary needs due to COVID19. OW clients of the TBDDSAB can apply for additional dollars for items such as Personal Protective Equipment (masks, gloves etc..) as well cleaning supplies. A single applicant can receive \$50 and a family \$100. As of April 8, 2020, 559 applications for a total of \$40,650 have been approved. 306 singles and 253 families have been assisted. There have been no denials.

Funding provided under the Social Services Relief Fund through CHPI may be used towards initiatives such as:

- Building homeless shelter capacity (not including capital expenditures)
- Use of motels or hotels
- Housing allowances
- Transportation costs
- Food and supplies
- Enhanced cleaning services
- Non-medical staffing requirements (e.g., enhanced outreach services)
- Protective equipment.

Funding may also be used in community housing and supportive housing to assist with housing costs for in-situ tenants, protective equipment, and the provision of food and supplies for households in quarantine and/or isolation. More broadly, funding could be used towards initiatives delivered through local service agencies such as:

- Rent bank and emergency energy funds
- Food banks and grocery gift cards
- Community outreach to support seniors in self-isolation
- Transportation for low-income individuals to get to and from medical appointments.

Currently, TBDSSAB has established an Emergency Pandemic Fund to assist organizations by offering housing and related supports to individuals and households dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on this fund has been distributed widely across the District, and submissions are reviewed as received. Current beneficiaries of this fund include Greenstone Harvest Centre, Nipigon Red Rock High School and Salvation Army.

Administration is also working with partners including St. Joseph's Care Group, NorWest Community Health Centre, Thunder Bay District Health Unit and the City of Thunder Bay to facilitate an isolation shelter, using a hotel, for homeless individuals to house those who require separation from the general population due to possible exposure to the virus. Although it is difficult to estimate the need and usage of an isolation shelter at this time, a budget of \$318,000 is planned for the first 3 months.

Administration has secured access to additional motel rooms that could be used temporarily to accommodate other individuals experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. \$77,000 has been budgeted for this over the first 3 months.

Administration is reaching out to community housing and supportive housing providers to determine the need for cleaning supplies, PPE and requirements for assistance with measures to implement appropriate social distancing and self-isolation. This would include community housing units directly owned by TBDSSAB. Based on varied needs and initiatives, a budget of \$25,000 has been established for the first 3 months.

Additional supports and services are currently being developed to respond to the needs of the District as they arise.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Social Services Relief Fund is a 100% provincially funded program.

TBDSSAB has been notified that it is eligible to receive \$1,168,300 under the Service Manager portion, however only 50% (\$584,150) is to be provided immediately. The remaining amount is subject to reallocation or adjustment by MMAH as the emergency situation evolves.



As of April 8th, 559 Ontario Works clients had been assisted with emergency discretionary funding and 16 applications for OW Emergency Assistance had been received.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with information relative to the Social Services Relief Fund and Administration's current and possible supports offered throughout the District of Thunder Bay. Additional information and updates of the fund will be provided to the Board on a regular basis by the CAO.

REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED

None

PREPARED BY:	Crystal Simeoni, Manager, Housing Programs Jennifer Lible, Manager Social Assistance Programs The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
APPROVED / SIGNATURE:	
	Ken Ranta, Director, Integrated Social Services Division The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
SUBMITTED / SIGNATURE:	
	William (Bill) Bradica, Chief Administrative Officer The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board