



	<b>REPORT No.: 2021-58</b>
<b>MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 17, 2021</b>	<b>DATE PREPARED: OCTOBER 29, 2021</b>
<b>SUBJECT: SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MODERNIZATION UPDATE</b>	

### **RECOMMENDATION**

For information only.

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

To update the Board on the current and future vision of Social Assistance modernization and the current status of initiatives undertaken by TBDSSAB.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has been engaged in several activities in modernizing the Ontario Works (OW) delivery system. MCCSS is working with CMSMs and DSSABs to transform social assistance and co-design a new system that connects people to the supports they need to achieve greater independence and employment. The focus of the work of CMSMs and DSSABs in delivering social assistance will shift towards a greater emphasis on connecting those who rely on social assistance programs with the supports and services they need to move towards greater independence and employability.

### **COMMENTS**

#### **Centralized Intake**

In October 2020, MCCSS introduced a Centralized Intake (CI) process for applicants looking to apply for OW. MCCSS piloted the new intake model with 7 sites that went live in October 2020. MCCSS planned to have all 47 Service Managers live with CI by April 2021, though only 20 of the 47 Service Managers were engaged in April 2021. TBDSSAB went live with CI on June 21, 2021 with 14 other sites and there is one more group of sites that will go live in early 2022.

Applicants for OW benefits can apply by using the online Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA) or by contacting the CI by telephone. MCCSS Caseworkers (CW) at the Intake and Benefits Administration Unit (IBAU) determine the applicant's eligibility for OW. Once eligibility is determined, the case is transferred to the OW local office (LO) for

ongoing case management. MCCSS has set a target of 70% for CI in making the initial determination for OW eligibility of the cases that are processed by IBAU.

IBAU CW determine eligibility and grant assistance with follow up for the LO to complete in either 30, 60 or 90 days depending on the risk assessment that is performed at IBAU. Once the case is granted by IBAU, the local office contacts the client to discuss any items that were flagged for follow up. These items could be a rent verification, identification verification, or review of assets. The local CW also meets with the client to review their rights and responsibilities, obtain signed consents and to complete an employment plan. The local CW will also complete a client profile and employment assessment in GERE - TBDSSAB's stand-alone software to assist with employment planning.

There are applications for which the IBAU cannot determine eligibility for circumstances such as pending income or the applicant did not pass the ID verification process. These cases are transferred to the LO to assess eligibility and grant assistance if determined eligible.

Applications that are determined ineligible by IBAU are transferred to the LO to verify ineligibility at which point the LO CW informs the client of ineligibility. Internal Reviews resulting from decisions made by IBAU are heard through the LO.

There are certain categories of applications that cannot be completed by IBAU including applicants under 18 years of age, applications for Temporary Care Assistance, applicants requiring interpreter services, and homeless applicants who do not have a contact number for follow up and emergencies. These applications are assigned to the LO to complete an application.

Currently MCCSS is reviewing CI processes to scope in some of the excluded applications that are listed above.

### **Ontario Works E-Signature Pilot**

In August 2021, TBDSSAB was selected by MCCSS to participate as the first pilot site for the OW e-signature. MCCSS is piloting 3 legislated forms that will be sent to an OW applicant/recipient, via secured email, for an electronic signature. This will reduce the need for wet signatures to be obtained for initial and ongoing eligibility. MCCSS trained TBDSSAB staff in the use of the web-based e-signature tool, local processes were developed, and the e-signature pilot was launched in November 2021. Using lessons learned through TBDSSAB's use, the Ministry is looking to expand the service to all 47 OW sites in 2022.

### **Employment Services Transformation**

TBDSSAB Administration has been informed by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development that it will become part of Employment Services Transformation (EST) in late 2023. When this change is complete, OW Caseworkers will change the focus of their work with clients away from employment planning to Life Stabilization

Activities. While MCCSS has not officially committed to a definition of Life Stabilization, they have recently released the concept. MCCSS has outlined four focus areas:

1. Basic Needs: financial support, housing needs and crisis resolution
2. Life Skills: self-efficacy, education, and literacy/numeracy
3. Health: primary care, mental health and addictions, and ongoing medical concerns
4. Community Supports: dependent care, justice and legal support and cultural connections.

TBDSSAB CW are already engaged with clients in these areas. While employment planning with a client, many of these areas would be considered “barriers to employment” and as such the CW and client work together to resolve them. When TBDSSAB moves from an employment focus to Life Stabilization, the CW will focus solely be on these four focus areas. New pathways and partnerships will be forged and exiting partnerships will be strengthened.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**



There are no immediate financial implications resulting from this report.

**CONCLUSION**

It is concluded that this report provides the Board with updated information on the current and future impacts of Social Assistance Modernization.

**REFERENCE MATERIALS ATTACHED**

Attachment #1 [Centralized Intake Process Flowchart](#)

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