



Staff Report to Council - for Information

Title: Q3 2024 Income and Support Services Update

From: Tina Metcalfe, Director Human Services

Date: November 21, 2024

Report Number: HS-2024-045

Report Purpose:

This report is for information.

Report Summary:

The Income and Support Services Q3 Report provides an update regarding service delivery outcomes and highlights key collaborations and initiatives to support social assistance recipients in Bruce County toward greater employment readiness and community inclusion.

Background/Analysis:

Social Assistance caseloads through to the end of Q3 were averaged 621 households per month. This is an increase of approximately 12% over the same period in 2023. At the end of Q3, 500 applications for Ontario Works and Temporary care assistance were received (online and in-person) and 41 applications for Emergency Assistance. This represents an increase of over 18% in the number of applications from the same period in 2023.

Integrated Employment Services

The provincial Employment Services Transformation continues, with the final Phase 3 sites set to onboard in early 2025. Locally, our division is working closely with our Service System Manager (SSM) to improve connections between individuals on social assistance and Employment Ontario (EO) service providers, focusing on enhancing the Integrated Case Management approach and referral quality.

As of Q3 2024, 203 individuals on social assistance (26% of the cumulative caseload from January to September) have been referred to EO for employment services. Referrals are based on assessments and discussions indicating readiness for employment participation.

Individuals facing crises or significant barriers are not referred to EO and are supported by Income and Support Services staff for support in accessing stability supports to address their immediate needs.

Staff hosted a half-day session with our largest EO service provider in September to focus on having consistent approaches for determining client readiness for employment services, assessing motivation, and expectations around service delivery upon EO's acceptance of a referral.

Person-Centered Supports

Throughout Q3, efforts continued to meet stability needs for social assistance recipients, emphasizing partnerships and integrated processes to better serve vulnerable residents.

In August, staff began providing support for applications to the Housing Stability Fund program administered by Housing Services. By leveraging Ontario Works discretionary benefits, which are 100% provincially funded, ISS can assist applicants receiving social assistance with maintaining or acquiring housing.

This strategic use of discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients helps extend the availability of the Housing Stability Fund, thereby allowing a greater number of Bruce County residents to access the supports needed to secure or maintain housing.

In September, staff attended the Welcoming the World: A Diversity and Belongingness Conference in Owen Sound in September. This event, organized by local partners, focused on cultural diversity, inclusion, and reducing barriers in Grey Bruce.

Through keynote speakers, workshops, and stories from individuals with lived experiences, staff strengthened ties with key regional partners and gained strategies to promote diversity, and an inclusive and welcoming community.

Also in September, staff participated in a guided tour of the Brightshores Wellness and Recovery Centre, gaining firsthand insight into its facilities and programming. This visit was followed by an engagement session with center staff, focused on how we can support program participants in their recovery journey.

Following these discussions, our staff worked with social assistance delivery partners in Grey County and our local ODSP office to develop a coordinated approach to assist clients in both treatment and transitional supportive living beds at Brightshores.

This collaborative effort enhances service integration and facilitates timely and consistent supports for clients as they transition in and out of the Centre and across programs.

At the end of Q3, The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced an expansion of its Centralized Intake model for Ontario Works, an initiative that has been evolving since 2021. This latest iteration builds on the ministry's vision for a streamlined, province-wide intake system, and will see MCCSS assuming responsibility for initial eligibility decisions and payments in 10 phase one sites.

The intent is for municipalities to focus more fully on client-centered case management, as the ministry's "digital first" approach aims to automate intake processes and reduce local administrative tasks. Amendments to Ontario Regulation 135/98 will retain current cost-sharing arrangements, with no immediate funding changes, as the ministry gathers insights to refine its approach in anticipation of full provincial rollout by 2025.

Given that the centralized intake system has not yet delivered the anticipated administrative efficiencies for local offices that it originally projected, key ISS staff will monitor this phase closely and will actively engage in feedback and review sessions with MCCSS and Phase one sites to assess the impact on service delivery and client outcomes, ensuring that Bruce County is well-positioned to transition to this expanded Centralized Intake model in 2025.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has changed its funding model for Ontario Works delivery partners, moving away from holding funding at 2018 expenditure actuals. In response to steadily rising caseloads, the Ministry has reinstated the previous funding model with some adjustments to better address evolving needs. For 2025, the Ministry has updated the notional Program Delivery Funding (PDF) allocations, based on monthly average caseloads from October 2022 to September 2024.

Under this revised model, the 2025 PDF allocation for the County of Bruce is set at \$1,173,600, reflecting a 4.82% increase over the 2024 allocation of \$1,119,600. This increase is specific to the 50-50 funded Ontario Works Administration component, which has risen from \$936,700 in 2024 to \$990,700 in 2025.

These funds will allow staffing to be maintained at current levels and provide additional funding for stability supports to program participants.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

There were no Interdepartmental consultations with this report.

Link to Strategic Goals and Objectives:

Community and Partnerships - Build a strong and inclusive community

Community and Partnerships - Enhance and grow partnerships

Link to Departmental Plan Goals and Objectives, if any:**Report Author:**

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Departmental Approval:

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Approved for Submission:

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