




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	September 6, 2024
SUBJECT:	Provincial Centralized Intake Update and Regulatory Changes Taking Effect October 1, 2024
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Stuart Beumer Director, Ontario Works Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

The purpose of this Communication Update is to advise Council of an announcement that the Province made today.

Today, the Province announced the next phase of its social assistance renewal plan, taking effect October 1, 2024. The changes involve the province taking on increased responsibilities related to Ontario Works applications and initial eligibility decisions.

The province is refining the current Centralized Intake model to simplify and standardize the application process and initial eligibility determination for Ontario Works. This is intended to reduce the local administrative burden and allow municipalities to focus more on providing impactful, person-centered support to Ontario Works participants. The City of Hamilton was selected to be part of the first phase to implement these changes beginning October 1, 2024, along with nine other municipalities. Full implementation across the province is expected to be completed in stages throughout 2025.

The province is making regulatory changes to facilitate this increased role pertaining to local Ontario Works service delivery. This means that the Ministry's Intake and Benefit Administration Unit (IBAU) will be responsible for making initial eligibility decisions for Social Assistance Digital Applications (SADA), issuing decision letters on these applications, authorizing initial Ontario Works payments for Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA) applications, and taking responsibility for reviewing and defending these decisions through appeal processes.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

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City of Hamilton Ontario Works staff will continue to be responsible for emergency assistance, temp care assistance, and applicants under 18. City staff will also continue to be responsible for ongoing eligibility determination, benefits administration, and case management support to clients.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has also confirmed that there will be no impact on cost-sharing or funding arrangements because of these changes or the supporting regulatory amendments. The province recognizes that the Ontario Works caseloads have been increasing since the pandemic, therefore this change will enable case managers to continue offering valuable assistance to applicants, allowing them to focus more on impactful, person-centered support. This approach aims to accelerate pathways to employment and financial independence while helping meet provincial service contract targets. Additionally, case managers will provide a seamless approach, offering information and guidance on online and phone applications.

This is a further step towards the provincial vision for Social Assistance reform that includes modernized, centralized, and streamlined processes to support the administrative delivery of the program while increasingly focusing our municipal role on supporting people with person-centered case management supports.

This provincial decision has come to us with limited notice, and we will be working with provincial officials, staff, and our community partners to understand the documents and prepare for changes happening October 1st. We remain committed to supporting residents in accessing the financial support and benefits that they are entitled to and rely upon under the Ontario Works program.

We will continue to keep Council members updated on these changes and their impact, and how residents can be supported in accessing Ontario Works assistance.

Should you have any further questions on the above, please contact Stuart Beumer, Director, Ontario Works Division at stuart.beumer@hamilton.ca or 365-323-2173.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" - Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Memo

Appendix "B" - Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services Questions and Answers

**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social Services**

**Ministère des Services à l'enfance
et des Services sociaux et
communautaires**



Social Assistance Programs
Division

Division des programmes d'aide
sociale

Social Assistance Central
Services Branch

Direction des services centralisés en
matière d'aide sociale

2 Bloor Street West, 24th Floor,
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9

2, rue Bloor ouest, 24e étage, Toronto
(Ontario) M7A 1E9

September 6, 2024

MEMORANDUM TO: Commissioners and CAOs of all CMSMs and DSSABs

FROM: Dr. Andres Laxamana, Director, Social Assistance Central
Services Branch

SUBJECT: **Centralized Intake Update and Regulatory Changes**

Ontario remains committed to building a more responsive, efficient, and person-centred social assistance system that lifts people up and leaves no one behind. To this end, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has prioritized the improvement of our social assistance programs, particularly on the improvement of Centralized Intake for Ontario Works.

Further to our communication on August 31, 2023, I am sharing another update on this important work.

As part of the work to complete Centralized Intake, the ministry intends to make a regulatory change that will designate the Ministry as the Ontario Works delivery agent and designate Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) as delivery partners in 10 geographic areas of the province. The ministry will be responsible for initial eligibility decisions, including authorization of initial payment and notifying applicants in 10 areas of the province. The intake model will focus on promoting a "digital first" experience, reducing time consuming and manual tasks and rules, and increasing automation. This will allow municipalities to focus more on providing impactful, person-centred supports.

The ministry also recently made technical amendments to Ontario Regulation 135/98 (Administration and Cost Sharing) to maintain the cost-sharing relationship that currently exists between the ministry, municipalities, and DSSABs when the ministry

becomes the delivery agent and they become delivery partners. There are no impacts at this time to cost sharing or funding arrangements as a result of the amendments.

What will this look like?

The implementation of Centralized Intake will be iterative and will build on what we learn from the experiences of municipalities and DSSABs. Full implementation, across the province, will be completed in 2025.

The ministry will handle initial eligibility decisions for most applications, excluding a few specific types. Municipalities will continue to manage emergency assistance and temporary care assistance as well as under 18 applications and ongoing eligibility reviews. Decisions made by delivery partners will be deemed to be those of the Ministry's Ontario Works administrator.

This is a critical step towards building a more responsive, efficient, and person-centered social assistance system that focuses on people by giving them more one-on-one support from case workers, resulting in a faster pathway to employment and financial independence.

While we acknowledge previous challenges in the journey so far, we remain committed to learning from our experiences to ensure these exciting changes bring meaningful improvements for both you and the individuals we serve. We will continue to work with municipal and DSSAB partners to ensure we are well-positioned to address any challenges efficiently and effectively.

Attached is a question-and-answer document to support discussions with your municipal councils and partners, answer questions, and help identify any concerns. Please reach out to me at Andres.Laxamana@ontario.ca or Helene Fredette at Helene.Fredette@ontario.ca if you have any questions about these changes.

This work would not be possible without the close collaboration of municipalities and DSSABs across the province. I look forward to continuing to work together with you toward our common goal of creating a more efficient, effective, and streamlined social assistance system that supports Ontarians who need it most.

Sincerely,
Andres Laxamana



Dr. Andres Laxamana
Director

Attachments:

- Questions and Answers

Copy:

- CMSM and DSSAB Ontario Works Administrators

MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Centralized Intake Update

Questions and Answers

What is Centralized Intake?

Centralized Intake is a process designed to simplify the Ontario Works application process for clients and streamline municipal administrative burden by transferring the responsibility for making initial eligibility decisions on Ontario Works applications and notifying applicants from Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) to the province.

Why is intake being centralized for Ontario Works?

The Ontario Government remains committed to a more efficient social assistance system that focuses on people and helps them achieve sustainable employment and independence, where possible. Centralized intake aims to:

- Improve the applicant experience through a fast, seamless, modernized intake experience,
- Reduce the administrative burden for clients and staff,
- Deliver a consistent and accountable process,
- Free up municipal capacity to focus on high impact person supports, and
- Reduce duplication of work between the Ministry and Municipalities.

How will people apply for Ontario Works when the Centralized Intake model is implemented?

In the updated process online applications and phone applications will continue to be utilized as the main method for applying:

1. **Online Application:** Applicants can still apply online through the official website. This method remains convenient and accessible.
2. **Phone Application:** Applicants can continue to apply over the phone by calling ServiceOntario. Trained staff will continue to guide them through the application process.
3. **In-person applications:** Cohort 1 in-person services will be via ODSP offices. If/when an applicant shows up in the local ODSP office, they will be provided the information on how to apply online or via phone. Centralized intake staff will be responsible for any appointments that are required for Ontario Works applicants. Applicants will have access to a phone and/or public access

terminal via ODSP offices to begin the application process. The long-term solution for in-person services is to be determined.

Is there an in-person option for clients who visit an Ontario Works office to apply for Ontario Works?

As part of our commitment to a seamless experience, we are implementing a “no wrong door” approach with municipal offices. While local municipal offices will no longer accept applications directly, they will continue to provide valuable assistance to applicants. Specifically, they can offer information and guidance regarding the online and phone application processes.

Which geographic areas are impacted by these changes?

Centralized Intake will be implemented across all 47 geographic areas of the province. An initial 10 sites will be impacted by these changes, with more sites to come on board later, with the date and time to be determined. The initial 10 sites which will go-live this Fall 2024 include:

- City of Brantford
- City of Hamilton
- City of Kawartha Lakes and County of Haliburton
- City of Peterborough and County of Peterborough
- County of Northumberland
- District Municipality of Muskoka
- Norfolk County and Haldimand County
- Regional Municipality of Niagara
- Regional Municipality of Peel
- Regional Municipality of York

Which elements of intake is the province taking on as part of this work?

The ministry will handle initial eligibility decisions for most applications, excluding a few specific types. Municipalities will continue to manage emergency assistance and temporary care assistance as well as under 18 applications and ongoing eligibility reviews.

We will further clarify roles and responsibilities between the province, municipalities and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) as we mature the model to further improve and streamline the delivery of social assistance.

What is the longer-term plan for having the province take on all intake decisions across the province?

Full implementation, across the province, will be completed in 2025. We will keep you updated as work progresses over the coming weeks and months.

How is the province collaborating with municipalities and DSSABs to improve and enhance centralized intake?

We continue to actively engage our municipal and DSSAB partners to ensure that we remain aligned on this collaborative approach to improve our program delivery to best support Ontarians. Building on past feedback received from engagement tables, user research and our municipal partners, our goal is to empower municipal governments to prioritize person-centered services.

How will the ministry be engaging ODSP staff?

While there will be minimal impact on their day-to-day activities, we are committed to supporting ODSP teams during this transition, and operational readiness and change management processes are being developed. This includes:

- ODSP onsite visits for the 10 offices to socialize IBAU processes, meet and greets with staff, and providing an opportunity for questions and answers,
- Providing job aids and resources to support Ontario Works/Centralized intake related questions and to potential support walk-ins,

Will municipalities still be asked to deliver “life stabilization” (person-centered) supports for ODSP clients, or to people in crisis or who are supported by other municipal programs?

No. The province will be taking on the Centralized Intake function, but there will be no realignment of the delivery of person-centered supports. Provincial local offices will continue to deliver person-centered supports to ODSP clients and municipalities will continue to deliver person-centered supports to Ontario Works clients.

Moving forward, we will continue to work with municipal partners to focus on helping Ontario Works clients achieve sustainable employment and independence.

Will there be impacts to First Nations delivery agents?

These changes do not impact First Nations Ontario Works delivery.

How will this impact my funding?

There are no impacts at this time to funding arrangements as a result of the amendments. Recognizing that the Ontario Works caseload has been increasing since the pandemic, we are updating municipal funding allocations for 2025. No municipalities will experience a reduction.

Who should I contact if I have additional questions?

If you have any questions, please speak with your manager or you can send an email to ci.communications@ontario.ca.