



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	December 5, 2024
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Ontario Works Caseload Profile (HSC24037) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not applicable

INFORMATION

This report provides Council with an overview of the Ontario Works Caseload Profile (see Appendix “A” to Report HSC24037) developed by Ontario Works staff using caseload data from the provincial Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) for the month of January in the years 2022, 2023 and 2024, as well as Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services generated reports.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of key demographics, trends within the caseload, and assist program management in planning local service delivery and oversight. Additionally, the report supports ongoing work with local community agencies providing programming and supports for low-income residents.

The *Ontario Works Act, 1997 (O. Reg. 136/98)* designates the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services as the delivery agent and the City of Hamilton as delivery partner in the administration of social assistance income support and person-centred case management services.

As delivery partner, we provide case management support that is focused on working with clients to complete assessments and build action plans that promote self-sufficiency and readiness for employment. Using an integrated model, clients are

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referred by Ontario Works staff to Employment Ontario providers for supports to obtain employment.

The Ministry sets performance targets in the following four outcome areas as part of the annual service planning process with municipal delivery partners. Hamilton's performance outcome targets for 2024 are:

- 100% of adults with participation requirements have a valid action plan;
- 27% of adults with participation requirements are referred to Employment Ontario;
- 10% of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) exit to employment; and
- 35% of Ontario Works cases (individual or family units) who exit the program for any reason and return within one year.

Key Caseload Trends and Service Delivery Impacts

Several trends found within the report are being monitored closely and have been identified by local Ontario Works management as risks to meeting provincially mandated program outcomes and effectively supporting clients.

Social Assistance Rates and Cost of Living

The continued inadequacy of social assistance rates and the increased cost of living in Ontario has a direct impact on an individual or families' ability to stabilize their current circumstances and be referred to Employment Ontario to focus on finding employment.

The average monthly rent paid by Ontario Works households in Hamilton rose to \$771.00 in January 2024 from \$691.00 in 2022. While a difference of \$120.00 may not seem large, it is important to note that Ontario Works rates have not increased since 2018. Staff support clients to maintain their housing by issuing a variety of additional benefits. Between January 2022 and January 2024 there was a 170.6% increase in the number of additional benefits issued to clients to maintain/obtain housing.

Individuals and families receiving Ontario Works are also experiencing the same cost of living increases that are being experienced by all households and have a very limited ability to cope with this added pressure. As per *Statistics Canada (Consumer Price Index: Annual Review, 2023)* the cost of living has increased by 14.1% in the last three years.

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Caseload Size

The Ontario Works caseload is increasing in Hamilton and across the province. Hamilton's caseload rose by 9% from January to June 2024, which is higher than the provincial increase of 6.8%. Additionally, the Hamilton caseload increased 20.6% from June 2023 to June 2024, which is higher than the provincial increase of 16.4%. The upward trend highlights significant challenges facing individuals and families and increases the workload for all staff roles within the Ontario Works division.

Increase in Single Individuals on Ontario Works

An Ontario Works case refers to a single individual or a family unit on social assistance (e.g., a family is counted as one case). The Hamilton caseload has historically been comprised primarily of singles and sole support parents. Since 2022, there has been an increase in the proportion of single cases from 60.7% to 64.9%. The increase in single individuals on the caseload is concerning because there are very few Provincial or other low-income programs focused on supporting single, low-income individuals under 65 years of age.

Support Needs and Waitlists for Service

Support needs acknowledged by Ontario Works clients during assessments and meetings with their Case Manager provide a glimpse into the depth of need within the caseload. Top client support needs identified within the report include:

- Mental Health
- Housing
- Food Security
- Transportation

Importantly, the report also provides information on waitlisted services by provider types. The ability of clients to make progress towards achieving their goals and stabilize their circumstances is directly impacted by service availability and lengthy waitlists. Although not easy to quantify, and not specifically reflected in the data, client outcomes are not optimized as a result of the increasing gap between client needs and ability to access critical community services and support in a timely manner. In addition, case management demands and workload is increasing as staff work to assist clients to research alternative referral options, follow-up on referral status and navigate waitlists for various health and human services systems.

These trends, combined with increasingly complex client needs and pressures across human and health services systems within the community, will affect client progress, well-being, and program outcome achievement. Addressing these challenges will require collaborative efforts from all levels of government, and community organizations.

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Next Steps

Data and trends included in the Caseload Profile Report will be used as part of the Ontario Work's 2025 service planning processes, with the Ministry and with our community partners supporting clients. The service planning process will also include engagement with clients and key community partners and will respond to specific priority areas identified by the Ministry. The Ontario Works Division's 2025 Service Plan with the Ministry will be brought for information to Council within the second quarter of 2025. This Service Plan will provide more detailed information on service delivery priorities, challenges, strategies, and targets for the Ontario Works Division in 2025 and will be shared with Council in Q2, 2025.

Additionally in 2025, the province has announced an interim funding model that removes the freeze on Ontario Works administrative funding to municipalities that has been in place since 2018. This step has been taken in recognition of growing caseloads and municipal cost pressures. This provides the Ontario Works Division with an opportunity to make critical investments in client services and benefits to support optimal client outcomes, pilot and evaluate new interventions and address service delivery pressures. These investments include:

- Intensive support intervention pilot for individuals receiving Ontario Works for five years or longer;
- Enhanced client benefits to support active participation and achievement of action plan goals;
- Increased case management supports for clients with complex needs; and,
- Enhanced training supports for staff.

The information and trends identified within the Caseload Profile inform these investments as part of budget development within the Ontario Works Division that will move forward to Council through the City's 2025 budget process.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix "A" to Report HSC24037: Ontario Works Caseload Profile

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