



INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee	WARD(S) AFFECTED: City Wide
COMMITTEE DATE: April 6, 2011	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Online Application for Social Assistance (CS11033) (City Wide)	
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:
 Not Applicable

Information:

Background

For over a decade, the technological tools used to deliver social assistance in Ontario have remained virtually unchanged. However, in the spring of 2009, the Ministry of Community and Social Services announced a plan to begin modernizing the delivery of social assistance in Ontario. The Social Services Solutions Modernization Project will see the Ministry replace the current, decade-old Service Delivery Model Technology with a commercial-off-the-shelf solution by the spring of 2013. The new solution will be developed using Cúram Software, a proven world-leading, case management solution for social services.

As the first phase of the redevelopment, the Ministry will be implementing an online application tool for social assistance in the spring of 2011. According to the Ministry's timetable, the online application for social assistance will be launched to select pilot sites across the province in April, 2011. It will then be launched to all other sites, including the City of Hamilton, in May, 2011.

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The online application will include:

- an anonymous screening process to enable applicants to assess eligibility for all programs (Ontario Works, Temporary Care Assistance, Ontario Disability Support Program, and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities);
- an accessible application for social assistance benefits;
- an appointment scheduling feature to select up to three dates and a time for a verification interview in the local office;
- one window to apply for multiple programs: Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, and Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities; and,
- English and French language capability.

Once an applicant has completed an online application, it will be forwarded to the appropriate local office based on the information provided by the applicant. A worker within that office will:

- review the application;
- schedule an appointment for the applicant to come into the local office to verify the information provided and complete the application process; and,
- upload the application into the Service Delivery Model Technology.

Applicants will still have the option of initiating an application over the telephone or in person.

Local Impact

The online application for social assistance will provide another method for the community to apply for social services. People in rural areas of the municipality and those with mobility issues and other disabilities will benefit from the accessibility that the online application will provide.

Regarding service delivery, the impact will be minimal. Intake staff, who already take applications over the phone, will contact the applicant to confirm the information contained in their online application, schedule a date and time for a verification interview, and upload the information from the online application into the Service Delivery Model Technology. For those applicants who do not have a telephone number, the online application will instruct them to contact the local office to arrange for an appointment. Online technical support for applicants will be available from a provincial hotline.

There will be some impact to workloads leading up to the roll-out of the online application. The impact will be isolated to:

- Updating existing business processes to incorporate the online application;

- Communicating the availability of the online application to community service providers, particularly those who have public access to computers and who may be assisting their clients with an online application for social assistance; and,
- Coordinating the training in the new business processes including uploading the online application to the Service Delivery Model Technology for intake staff and a general overview for all other staff.

The Ministry will be providing communication materials to be used to inform community partners of the online application. The Benefit Eligibility Division's Quality Assurance and Compliance Unit have already commenced updating existing business processes based on the information that has been provided by the Ministry to date.

Conclusion

The introduction of the online application for social assistance, part of the Social Services Solution Modernization Project, will provide yet another avenue for Ontarians to apply for the services they need. The online application is in keeping with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and with the French Languages Services Act. It will allow people to apply for social assistance, in either English or French, from the comfort of their own home or anywhere that public access to the internet is provided. The City of Hamilton will provide public access to the internet at 3 Ontario Works sites located at 181 Main St W, 1550 Upper James and 2255 Barton St E. Finally, the online application will enable community service providers to assist their clients to apply for social assistance from their office or resource centres.

Locally, the impact on service delivery will be minimal. Business processes are currently being modified to guide Intake staff through the process of uploading information from the online application into the Service Delivery Model Technology. There is no impact on the budget; and no additional staff are required to accommodate the online application process.