

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent
Community Human Services
Employment and Social Services
Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Polly Smith, Director, Employment and Social Services
Date: March 5, 2021
Subject: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

On February 11, 2021, the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced Ontario's new vision for social assistance. This vision was the result of consultation with the Provincial-Municipal Human Services Collaborative (PMHSC) where Chatham-Kent is represented by the General Manager, Community Human Services. This vision is outlined in Appendix A, attached. The purpose of this report is to give Council an overview of social assistance transformation.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services outlines the vision as: "To create an efficient and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they move towards employment and independence."

As Ontario continues to recover from the impact of COVID-19, hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are still unable to return to the labour market. As such, Ontario's social assistance system has been preparing to support increased numbers of people back towards employment, financial independence, and stability.

The vision is intended to automate and simplify tasks that are largely administrative, for example applications for financial assistance, making it quick and easy for people to access financial assistance while ensuring program integrity. At the same time, municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centered case management supports with knowledge of community resources to help people in need with life stabilization and ultimately financial independence.

This system will allow case managers to further focus on the needs of their customers, helping those who can get back to work to support the province's economic recovery.

It will also allow municipalities to leverage their in-depth knowledge of local resources to build a life stabilization framework that works at the community level.

Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) both operate under complex legislation and eligibility criteria that have evolved over time. With advances in technology, many application steps can be completed electronically. For example, clients could apply for assistance online, and their financial eligibility could be verified with information from Canada Revenue Agency and Equifax automatically. This will allow individuals to apply at any time of day or night at their own convenience for their first payments, with subsequent assistance after a case management interview.

Chatham-Kent Employment and Social Services (CKESS) division was selected as a prototype site for Centralized Intake on October 30, 2020 and has been involved in co-design of the system since that time. Further, division staff underwent a time study in 2019 and found that Ontario Works applications took an average of 15% of case managers' time. The Ministry's goal is that within two years 70% of applications will be completed online and through centralized intake at the provincial level, with 30%, the more complex cases, being aided by "centralized" case managers over the phone.

Central to the vision of Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is a fundamental shift in the focus of social assistance from administering financial benefits to creating more of an emphasis on helping people stabilize their lives and move towards employment, independence, and improved well-being, or life stabilization.

What is Life Stabilization?

Life stabilization programming will allow Case Managers to assess personal needs with participants providing coaching towards success and connecting them to available resources. Case Managers will use the Ministry's Common Assessment Tool to collect information regarding key life stabilization areas, illustrated in the graphic below, and an action plan will be produced to support open dialogue with participants about their identified barriers and goals.



Figure 1: Key Life Stabilization Areas, Diagram courtesy of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services has established prototype sites for life stabilization activities that will inform how municipalities move forward with this service and new way of assisting clients.

Chatham-Kent Employment and Social Services Case Managers are well positioned to adapt to the new model due to their previous training and experience using motivational interviewing techniques. Motivational interviewing is a counseling method that helps people find the internal motivation they need to change their behavior (seek medical attention, look for work etc.) Motivational interviewing is a practical, empathetic, and short-term process that takes into consideration how difficult it is to make life changes. Case Managers essentially guide participants into finding their own reasons to make changes to increase their own well-being and life stability.

While the 2019 case management time study found that Ontario Works applications only took an average of 15% of case manager's time, it also showed they spend significant time on other administrative duties and employment referrals leaving minimal time for life stabilization activities. This changed during the pandemic when verification and employment activities were reduced and case managers connected with their clients more frequently to check on their well-being and offer any available supports or referrals. A recent client survey demonstrated that participants found their workers more accessible and helpful under this new model.

For many years, CKESS was in the top five municipalities for exits to employment, that is, clients exiting Ontario Works assistance due to income from employment. This is due to the unique programming developed by CKESS that includes motivation based pre-employment training and job placement. This work has helped both Ontario Works and ODSP recipients who would not otherwise be able to compete in the job market, and hadn't for many years, obtain employment.

The average Chatham-Kent Ontario Works caseload in 2020 was 2264; a decrease of 7.3% during the past year due in part to the introduction of the enhanced federal unemployment benefits and continued exits to employment. Caseloads are not expected to increase significantly until late fall of 2021 when many of those benefits will cease.

The Chatham-Kent Ontario Works caseload has been steadily decreasing since the last recession with the majority of the individuals remaining on caseloads having much higher and more complex needs. Further, approximately 30% are deferred from participating due to health or family needs. Data shows that there are at a minimum another 100 homeless individuals making employment unlikely for them until stable housing is achieved.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

The vision for Social Assistance Transformation includes the Ontario Disability Support Program. ODSP provides financial assistance and health benefits to applicants who have been deemed a person with a disability. Under the ODSP Act, applicants are

determined to have a substantial physical or mental impairment that is continuous and which has a direct correlation to their inability to work, take care of themselves, or participate in community life.

In 2020, CKESS successfully helped 128 Ontario Works participants apply for and obtain ODSP benefits. For many years, CKESS has assisted ODSP participants with employment assistance, supplementary (health related) benefits, and homelessness prevention activities. A portion of this caseload will move to CKESS under the new vision, with the intent of the division providing life stabilization assistance on an ongoing basis for those who need it.

The Ontario Disability Support Program had an average caseload of 4561 in 2020, and it has increased steadily for the last 15 years. Approximately 100 ODSP (spouses and dependent adults) work with Employment and Social Services for employment supports and job placements annually (by referral). Another 526 were assisted with discretionary funding in 2020 for things like dentures, medical equipment and orthotics and 490 were assisted with homelessness prevention funding.

Comments

While the details of the vision, including the funding formula are still in development, CKESS is prepared to successfully deliver services within the new model. As part of the new vision, employment program funding is being moved to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLSTD) and will not be part of the MCCSS Ontario Works funding envelope. It is the intent of CKESS to bid on specialized service delivery of employment programming, highlighting CKESS' work with motivational interviewing and job placement programming as key factors to successful transition to employment. To date, these services have only been offered locally by CKESS.

Chatham-Kent Employment and Social Services delivers over 20 programs funded by five provincial ministries, and regularly exceeds ministry expectations by working closely with the community and using data to make strategic decisions that place the needs of the client first.

Potential Benefits in Chatham-Kent

With all changes, there are potential gains and risks. The new vision offers the following possible benefits:

- A more holistic case management approach for people receiving social assistance that has the opportunity to provide help before the client has to endure a crisis
- Increased access to local services such as housing, medical care, mental health and addictions treatments, education, and literacy services
- A modern program that makes better use of technology
- A streamlined risk-based approach to eligibility determination that reduces administrative burden and creates efficiencies

Potential Risks in Chatham-Kent

Plans are in place to apply to MLTSD for service delivery funding to deliver motivational training and job placement services for individuals with high employment barriers. However, if all employment services were to be moved away from CKESS, there is a risk of decreased exits to employment and an increased caseload. If partners in employment do not have skilled staff, proven methodologies, and are unable to assist individuals with barriers to employment, and if CKESS does not have any funding to provide these services, increased caseloads and increased pressure on homelessness prevention may occur.

There is a risk for many Ontario Works participants who require assistance with life stabilization and employment, especially if these services are delivered through different ministries and different agencies. People living solely on social assistance are in extreme poverty. A single person receiving Ontario Works has to live on \$733/month while rent alone for a one bedroom unit is now typically over \$1000/month. Employment itself is life stabilizing for many people. With increased employment income, housing is becomes more secure. If financial supports under each area cannot be provided at the same time for people, it could have negative impacts on their life stability and employment options.

Should monthly social assistance rates paid to recipients remain low and housing rental rates continue to rise, housing instability and homelessness will be rampant potentially having a negative impact on the potential gains of the new life stabilization approach. Staff are not aware of any plans at the provincial level to increase monthly social assistance rates. Municipal Service Managers across the province are advocating for increased rates and the ability to issue emergency and discretionary assistance when needed. These are important abilities to prevent unnecessary stress or problems including increased homelessness for vulnerable people in Chatham-Kent.

In Conclusion

Risks can be mitigated with thorough consultations and planning, setting the ground work for success.

The social assistance transformation is scheduled to take place over the next three years through a co-design process with Municipal leaders. There is no information at this time on the funding formula for municipalities, anticipated caseload sizes or program details. The Division will continue to analyze, advocate, plan and adapt to the changing needs of the community and ministry's vision.

Consultation

While there was no consultation required to produce this information report, consultation will occur with community partners throughout the transformation process.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications from this report.

Prepared by:

Polly Smith, BA, Dipl.M.M.
Director, Employment & Social Services

Reviewed by:

April Rietdyk, RN, BScN, MHS, PHD PUBH
General Manager
Community Human Services

Attachment: Appendix A - Memo to Human Services Collaborative, SA Vision Placemat
EN-Accessible, SA Vision Q&A

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

Deputy Minister's Office

438 University Avenue
7th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Tel.: (416) 325-5225

Fax: (416) 325-5240

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

Bureau du Sous-ministre

438, avenue University
7^e étage
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1N3

Tél. : (416) 325-5225

Télééc. : (416) 325-5240



February 11, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Human Services Collaborative Members

FROM: Janet Menard, Deputy Minister

SUBJECT: A New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance

Today, Minister Smith announced [Ontario's new vision for social assistance](#) that we shared with you last month at the Provincial-Municipal Human Services Collaborative (PMHSC).

As you are well aware, Ontario is at a critical juncture, as we continue to struggle through the impacts of COVID-19. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are still unable to return to the labour market and many may have to turn to social assistance and other community supports and services, depending on the federal government decisions regarding the future of enhanced federal income benefits.

As such, Ontario's social assistance system must be ready to support increased numbers of people back towards employment, independence and stability. The new vision for social assistance aims to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people by connecting them with a range of local services and supports that respond to their unique needs and address barriers. Our goal is that once life stabilization is achieved, more people will also succeed in employment, contributing to better outcomes in all areas of their lives.

We know this plan is ambitious and requires significant consideration of how we can realign roles and responsibilities to best support clients. It will also involve legislative and regulatory changes to enable greater flexibility in decision making and service delivery, as

well as a new approach to funding. That is why we need to act now and accelerate work towards this critical transformation to support Ontario's economic recovery.

For this plan to be successful, municipalities and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) will be true partners in its design and implementation. While this plan identifies a path forward, it is the start of collaboration, not the end. The Province and municipal service managers and DSSABs will work together to engage broadly and drive forward this plan to create a better system for Ontarians.

We are sharing the attached material to support discussion with your municipal councils and other partners to engage with them on these changes, answer questions and identify any early concerns. The Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee (PMSAEC) will work to refine details of the co-design process to support a better understanding of how we will collectively work together to over the coming months.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Lindsay Jones at Lindsay.Jones@Ontario.ca

Sincerely,



Janet Menard
Deputy Minister

Attachments:

- Social Assistance Vision Placemat
- Questions and Answers

Copy:

- Ontario Works Administrators at all Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs)
- CMSM Commissioners and DSSAB Chief Administrative Officers
- City Managers
- Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA)
- Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA)
- The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
- City of Toronto
- Lindsay Jones, Director, Social Assistance Strategy and Transformation Branch

A working vision for social assistance

Vision:

To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence.

How we will realign:

Province

Delivers:

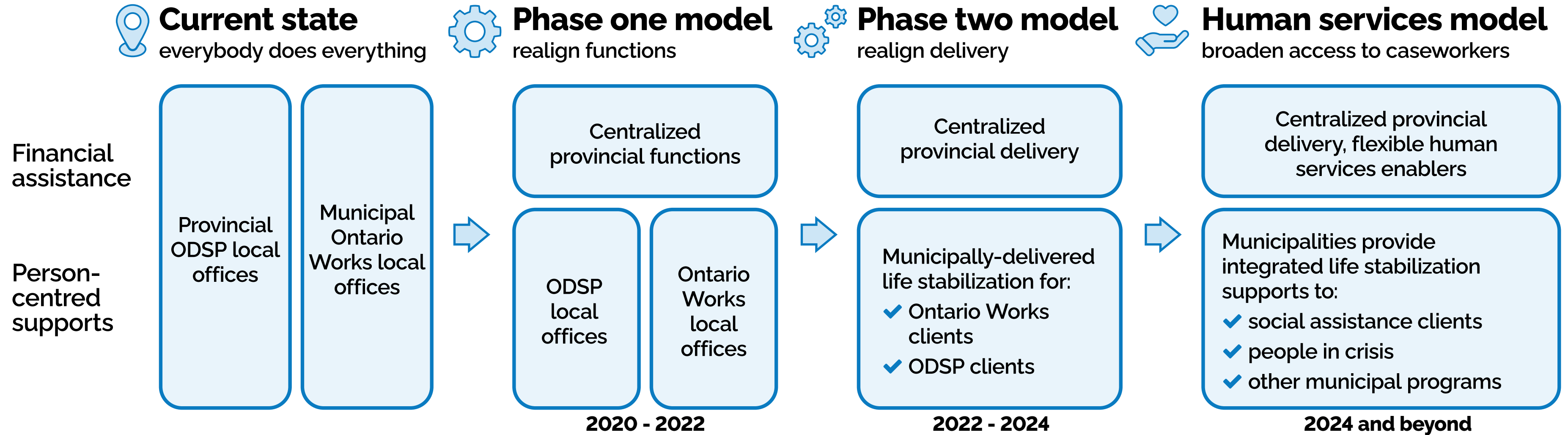
- ✓ Centralized financial assistance
- ✓ Financial controls and back-office functions suited to centralization or automation

Municipalities

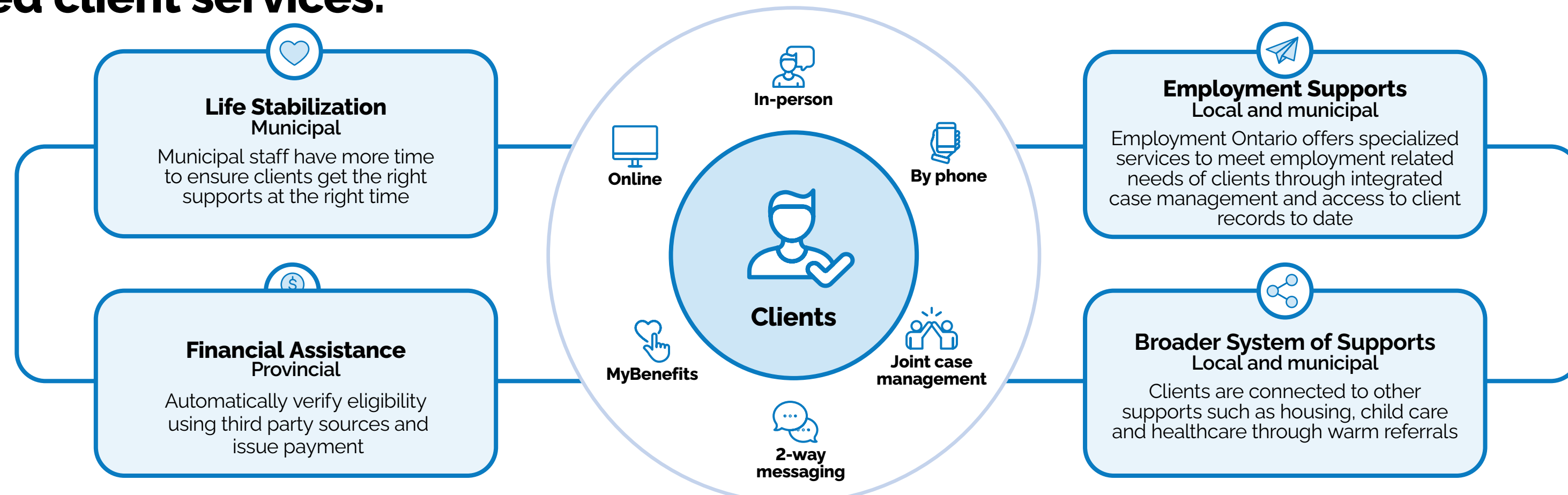
Delivers:

- ✓ Life stabilization – including needs assessment, service planning, warm referrals, discretionary benefits
- ✓ Person-centred, connected supports, and navigation of broader system (e.g., housing, employment, mental health)

How we will evolve over time:



Integrated client services:

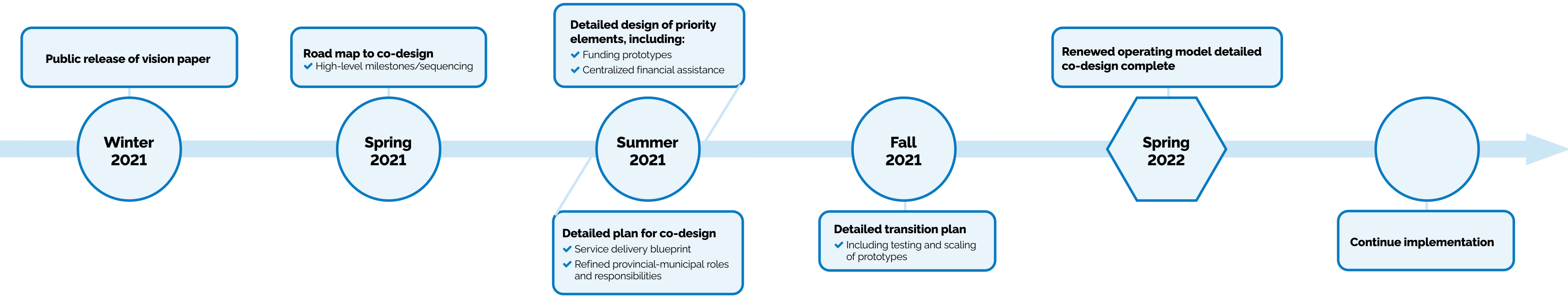


Social assistance: where we're headed

In the short term: co-designing a renewed operating model

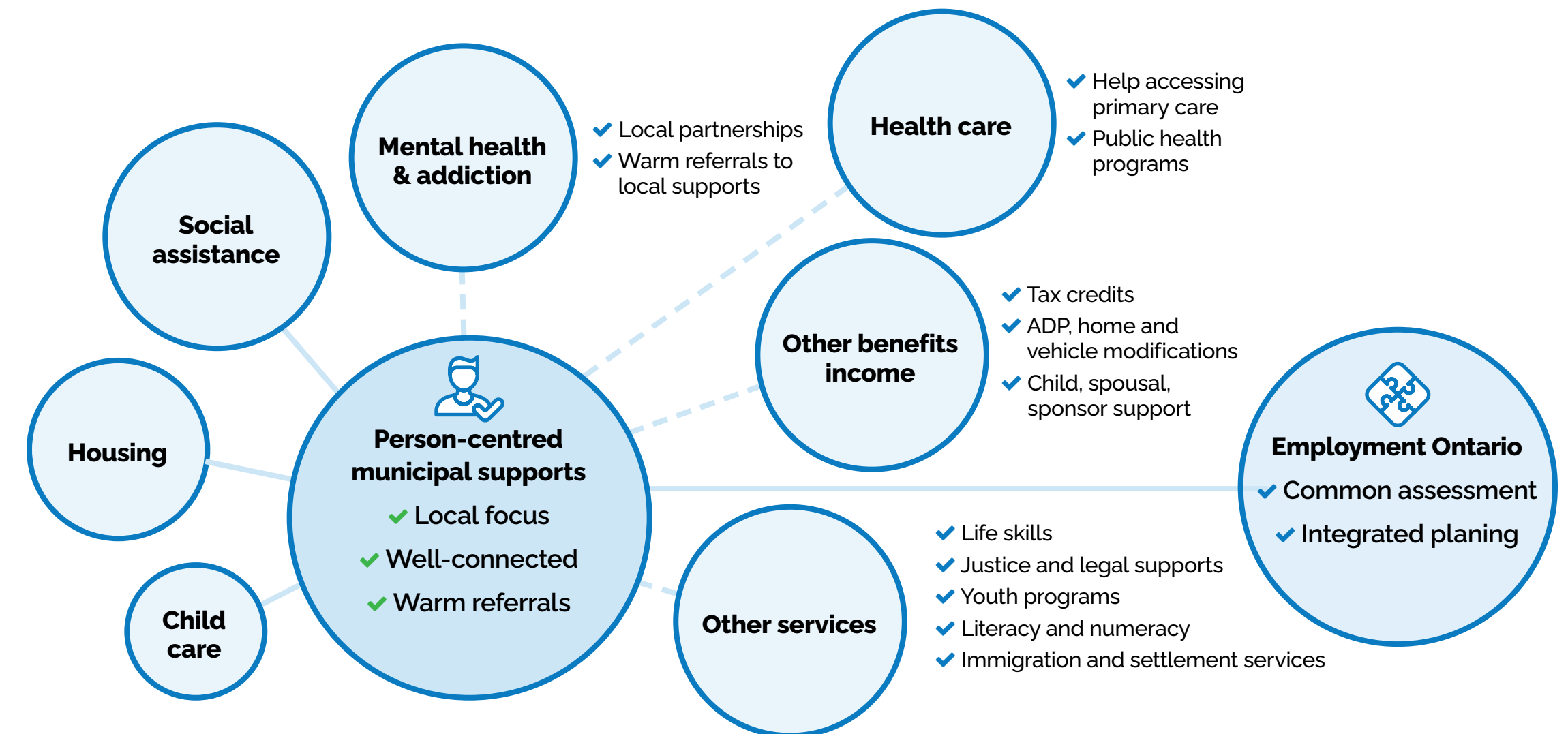
Prototype and implement: developing centralized provincial functions, starting with intake, and tools and processes to support life stabilization

Co-design: engaging to design key operating model layers, provincial and municipal functions, principles and processes



In the long term: moving to a human services delivery model

- ✓ In the human services model, benefits like social assistance become “tools” in the caseworker toolbox, as opposed to the other way around
- ✓ Caseworkers are knowledgeable about the broader system of benefits and supports, and can guide people to the supports they need – whether Ontario Works or something else
- ✓ People seeking help are triaged by municipal caseworkers, supported as needed, and potentially diverted from social assistance



Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal
Questions and Answers for Stakeholders and Partners

General

1. Why does the social assistance system in Ontario require transformation?

The COVID-19 outbreak has shown us a new approach is needed now more than ever - more Ontarians are looking to us for help with basic needs, to stabilize their family's lives, and to get back to work and financial security. Now is the time to build on the learnings from COVID-19 and work to fundamentally change how we deliver services.

Ontario finds itself at a critical juncture, with uncertainties about what economic recovery will look like for our most vulnerable. Ontario's social assistance system must be ready to focus on supporting people back into towards employment, independence and stability.

The new vision for social assistance aims to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, connecting them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success. It is a critical enabler to a whole-of-government approach to accessing human services that will not only help more people succeed in employment, but also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education. The pandemic has caused a protracted economic downturn and for some, a longer than expected absence from employment and as such, it will take an all of system approach to achieve economic recovery and supporting people back into jobs. That is why we need to act now and accelerate work towards this critical transformation to support Ontario's economic recovery.

2. What will the roles of the province, and municipalities and DSSABs be in the new vision?

At the core of this plan is a new delivery model for social assistance that looks at provincial and municipal roles - not along the traditional program lines of Ontario Works and ODSP, but around who can best provide the service to get the best results.

The premise of the vision is for the province to automate, streamline and realign functions that are largely administrative (e.g., provision of financial assistance),

making it quick and easy for people to access the system while ensuring program integrity.

At the same time, municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centred casework and knowledge of local community supports to provide all of the activities that support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment.

We will start by exploring how to realign ‘who does what’, designing with our municipal partners a phased multi-year plan that will transform the delivery of social assistance in Ontario. Broad engagement, testing and prototyping, and appropriate phasing will be key.

3. Why is there a focus on realigning provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities?

In the current state, we know that programs are hard to navigate, and many clients are unable to access the broader system of supports they need. By working with other ministries to build better connections between programs, Ontarians will better be able to access the supports they need.

We envision a human services model where:

- people can access support to stabilize their lives before and after someone qualifies for social assistance
- supports across the system are better aligned and integrated where possible
- social assistance is just one of many tools available to help people improve their quality of life

This system will allow caseworkers to focus on results for people, rather than on paperwork, helping those people who can get back to work and support the Province’s economic recovery.

The changes will support us achieving this vision by allowing the province to leverage its ability to provide a consistent, efficient, cost-effective, and technology-based administrative system. It will also allow municipalities and DSSABs to leverage in-depth knowledge of local communities to help build a life stabilization framework that works at the local level.

This builds on our continued focus on the integrity and sustainability of social assistance programs. By specializing based on function rather than program, we increase the efficiency, integrity and effectiveness of the overall system and free up

space to enable us to provide the level of service people need to make a difference in their lives.

4. How will other ministries be involved in this process?

Work is underway with other ministries to build better connections between programs so Ontarians can access the supports they need. Taking a whole-of-government approach will not only help more people succeed in employment, it will also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education.

We will work across government to engage partner ministries to collaborate and align on pieces of this work.

5. Where and when are these changes taking effect?

These changes will take effect over the next several years in phases.

We are working with municipalities and DSSABs to co-design and implement a plan that will gradually transform the delivery of social assistance across Ontario, beginning with co-designing a new operation model and consolidating financial assistance.

In general, 2021 and 2022 will be largely “learning and testing years,” as multiple projects are being prototyped, iterated and evaluated starting with a small sample of local offices and gradually expanding into more offices.

By the end of 2022, we hope to have reached full consolidation of financial assistance, and by 2024, we hope to begin rolling out a new human services model.

6. How will municipalities and DSSABs deliver life stabilization supports?

As the ministry seeks to improve client outcomes and relieve administrative burden for local office staff, life stabilization will become the foundational and measurable component of supporting a client’s progress towards employment.

The province, municipalities and community at large must all work together to help stabilize people’s lives and better employment outcomes for those who need help. The new vision is a starting point for further discussion among all sectors. The Province will continue to work with our municipal and DSSAB partners to engage with clients, staff, the community and those who will be an essential part of this transformation.

The province has been working with municipalities and DSSABs to develop a life stabilization framework and to work through what supports and changes are needed

and how we will continue to support clients to help them prepare for participation in employment activities.

7. Given the current COVID-19 emergency, why isn't the government raising social assistance rates?

The amount of financial assistance a person may be entitled to will depend on their individual circumstances including their income, expenses and family composition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has made significant additional investments through the Social Services Relief Fund, so that shelters, food banks, charities, non-profits and municipalities will have access to flexible funding to help cope with growing demands and extraordinary circumstances.

We are working with our municipal partners on developing a social assistance system that is modern, sustainable, and connects people to the supports they need to help them on a path to greater independence and employment. Our plan will see people on social assistance achieve independence and financial resilience through a network of supports that are right for them and their communities.

It's a long road ahead and we continue to build on the work we are doing to transform employment services in Ontario, streamline processes to make it easier for people to connect to the services they need, and refocus the efforts of caseworkers to provide one-on-one help to those who need it in this difficult time.

8. Are ODSP and Ontario Works being merged into one program?

No, the ministry is not combining the Ontario Works and ODSP programs. These programs remain distinct programs with different policy objectives. We are realigning the work that is done in both programs along functional lines to enhance effectiveness and efficiency.

Ontario Works

9. How was this vision developed?

Municipal and district partners, such as the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the City of Toronto, have been key partners in the development of this work and will continue to be engaged, along with other stakeholders and partners, as this work moves forward.

This new vision builds on the conversations that have been ongoing at various tables with municipal and DSSAB partners for a number years and learnings from previous reform plans and efforts, as well research in this sector including the Lankin and

Sheikh 2012 Report to MCCSS by the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: [Brighter Prospects: Transforming Social Assistance in Ontario](#) and the more recent Maytree [Report on System Transformation in Ontario Works](#). Both of these reports focus on the importance of aligning and integrating human services around locally delivered services and a person-centred approach.

The new vision for social assistance also takes into consideration the recommendations from the Auditor General, which highlighted the need to focus administration and strengthened program integrity.

While this plan identifies a path forward, it is the start of collaboration, not the end. The Province will continue to work closely with its municipal delivery partners – and with others – to refine the plan to create a better system for Ontarians.

10. What is in scope for co-design and who will be engaged?

We are committed to working collaboratively to co-design throughout the transformation process. Leveraging the capacity and expertise of the province and municipalities and DSSABs is central to developing a system that meets the needs of social assistance clients.

The co-design process will focus on developing a new operating model for social assistance, including roles and processes, the new human services approach, and funding, performance and accountability frameworks.

Representatives from across the social assistance and human services sector in Ontario will all have a role to play in the co-design process. This includes municipalities and DSSABs, partners across the provincial government, frontline staff, client groups, community organizations, disability organizations, urban Indigenous partners and other key partners.

As we consider the broader human services system and navigation of services to support life stabilization, sectors beyond social assistance will also be included as necessary (e.g., housing, child-care, mental health and addictions).

11. How will municipalities be engaged on co-design and implementation?

The Province will work with municipalities and DSSABs to set the stage for system transformation that drives outcomes, accountability and system performance.

This work will take place through channels such as the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee (PMSAEC), PMSAEC subcommittees and the Provincial Municipal Human Services Collaborative (PMHSC). PMHSC will be a forum to share information and receive early input from

municipal and DSSAB partners into the design process. PMSAEC is working to refine a detailed co-design plan that will provide clarity as to how different delivery partners and stakeholders will be able to participate.

We are committed to prototyping as much as possible, and the evidence from these prototypes will inform how we proceed as we work together to transform the social assistance system. Municipalities and DSSABs will also be involved in prototyping a range of initiatives including the Employment Services Transformation and centralized intake prototypes that are already underway.

12. Do these plans apply to First Nations Ontario Works delivery partners?

No. In recognition of their unique needs and priorities, the province will work with First Nations delivery partners, including at the MCCSS-First Nations Joint Social Services Table on a separate plan to renew social assistance in First Nations communities.

13. How will Ontario Works applicants and clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed, and we will utilize the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

The province will work closely with municipalities and DSSABs at the Provincial Municipal Social Assistance Employment Committee to plan communications in a coordinated and aligned way.

14. How do these changes fit with the Employment Services Transformation in Ontario Works prototype offices?

The new vision for social assistance builds on work that is currently underway to transform employment services in Ontario, starting with three prototype sites.

In the prototype sites, municipalities are now focused on life stabilization activities, and these prototypes will help inform how life stabilization is delivered.

15. When will EST be rolled out province-wide? When will municipalities and DSSABs be informed?

EST is currently in the prototyping phase as MTLSD monitors and evaluates the prototypes. Lessons learned from the prototype regions will be applied to the future roll-out across the province.

Once timelines for full provincial implementation have been established, they will be communicated with to partners and stakeholders. The ministry remains committed to providing regular communications to help our partners and stakeholders understand and prepare for any changes.

16. Will funding for municipal and district delivery agents be affected?

As transformation of both employment services and social assistance delivery proceeds, the funding model will evolve alongside the shifts in roles and responsibilities.

The co-designed system will include a new approach to funding and a new performance and accountability framework. The province and municipalities will work together to develop a funding approach that addresses administrative costs appropriately and realigns any municipal and provincial savings.

17. Who should municipalities and DSSABs contact if they have questions or concerns?

For program-specific questions, please contact your program supervisor.

Ontario Disability Support Program

18. How will this vision affect people with disabilities?

Streamlining and automating financial assistance and expanding digital and self-serve options will allow us to redirect resources to provide more life stabilization supports to people with disabilities. The new vision for the social assistance system where municipalities deliver life stabilization supports has the potential to provide a significant benefit to Ontarians with disabilities.

There is no immediate impact to the way ODSP clients access services, except for previously announced life stabilization supports being prototyped in the Employment Services Transformation (EST) prototype sites.

19. How will ODSP clients be informed of any potential impacts?

Clients will be contacted by their local office as needed. We will also use the MCCSS website and social media to ensure clients are made aware of any changes as they take place.

To support further communication, we will also work with municipal service managers to share information and resources with community services agencies and networks.

20. How will this impact ODSP local offices and their staff?

Today's announcement is introducing the long-term vision for social assistance transformation, that will happen in phases, taking place over several years. There are no immediate changes within ODSP or to the way clients currently access ODSP.