

**Subject: Update: Social Assistance Modernization and Employment Services Transformation**

**File Number: ACS2023-CSS-GEN-017**

**Report to Community Services Committee on 24 October 2023  
and Council 8 November 2023**

**Submitted on October 10, 2023 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services**

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**Ward: Citywide**

**Objet : Mise à jour sur la modernisation de l'aide sociale et la transformation des services d'emploi**

**Numéro de dossier : ACS2023-CSS-GEN-017**

**Rapport présenté au Comité des services communautaires**

**le 24 octobre 2023**

**et au Conseil le 8 novembre 2023**

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**Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville**

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**That the Community Services Committee recommend that Council receive this report for information.**

## **RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Comité des services communautaires recommande au Conseil de prendre connaissance du présent rapport.**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **Assumption and Analysis**

In February 2021, the Province announced its vision for a renewed Social Assistance system in Ontario, which includes a shift in Provincial-Municipal roles in the delivery of Social Assistance. In October 2021, Committee and Council received the [Social Assistance Modernization, Transformation and Integration Update report](#) (ASC2021-CSS-GEN-014) that provided an overview of the Province's plan and the preparations undertaken locally.

This report provides an update on the implementation of three key Provincial transformation initiatives, highlights changes to the local service delivery model in order to align with the Province's vision for social assistance, employment transformation and local priorities, and to achieve performance outcomes that will be tied to future Provincial funding. The implementation of Employment Service Transformation in Ontario also results in a 22 per cent reduction in Program Delivery Funding for Ottawa in 2024. This report identifies the implications of the funding reduction and mitigation strategies.

The Province's vision for a transformed Social Assistance system in Ontario is a multi-year plan that is intended to create an efficient, effective and streamlined system that focus on people's unique needs and addresses barriers to employment. The Province's focus has been on three areas of their transformation agenda:

#### **Centralized and Automated Intake:**

Ontarians applying for social assistance do so online or over the phone via the centralized and Provincially managed Intake and Administrative Benefits Administrative Unit (IBAU). Applicants are then assigned to a local office for follow up. When launched, the IBAU was expected to complete 70 per cent of all applications for Ontario Works Assistance, with 30 per cent being directed to the municipality, allowing more time for municipal staff to focus on person-centred stability supports. To date, the IBAU has not achieved the 70 per cent target and as a result, locally, the efficiencies and reduction in administrative tasks have not been fully realized while the resident's experience has also been impacted.

Adjustments have been made to the local intake model to prioritize the resident, their needs, and their service experience and to reduce some of the administrative workload for staff to support more high-impact activities. Staff regularly engage with the Province to share Ottawa's experiences related to the centralized intake model and to develop solutions.

### **Employment Services Transformation:**

Employment Services Transformation (EST) creates an integrated employment model whereby all employment services in Ontario, including those historically delivered by Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), are delivered by Employment Ontario. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development has selected regional Service Systems Managers (SSM) who are responsible for the planning, design and delivery of employment services. The Service System Manager for the Ottawa region is WCG International Consultants Ltd.

Employment Services Transformation will be implemented in Ottawa in January 2024; 2023 has been a planning and preparation year. Staff have been liaising with other municipalities, who were part of earlier phases of EST implementation, to learn from their experiences, as well as actively engaging with the SSM to ensure the continuity of employment services for social assistance recipients when the new model is launched.

The City of Ottawa has dual roles in Employment Service Transformation; as an Ontario Works Delivery Agent responsible for assessing and referring social assistance recipients to Employment Ontario (EO) for assistance with employment activities, and as an Employment Ontario Service Provider in the new integrated employment model.

### **Person-Centred Stability Supports:**

Ontario Works remains an employment focused program, providing short-term financial assistance while helping people transition to employment and become self-sufficient. Anecdotal information indicates that approximately 30 percent of the Ontario Works caseload is ready for referral to Employment Ontario, while others require focused, person-centred supports to help them ready for employment.

The municipal role in the transformed social assistance system is to provide Person-Centred Stability Supports which includes case management and systems navigation; providing wrap-around supports by connecting people to municipal and community-based services to address their unique needs, improve their circumstance and addressing barriers to employment.

A Common Assessment and Action Plan (CAAT) tool is mandated for use by the Province and will be used by both Ontario Works and Employment Ontario staff in the new employment model, to support wrap around services, integrated case management planning, monitoring and goal achievement.

Municipalities will also provide Person-Centred Stability Supports and referrals to Employment Ontario, for non-disabled adults who are part of a family unit receiving ODSP. Staff are working with the Ottawa ODSP office to understand the scope of the client group, develop a plan for referring to Employment and Social Services, as well as related business processes to ensure coordinated supports.

### **Service Delivery Model Planning:**

Employment and Social Services has been re-organizing its service delivery approach to align to Social Assistance and Employment Transformation and to be successful in our role in delivering person-centred supports and services. The service area is developing innovative approaches to service delivery, while ensuring that access is simple and easy to navigate. While the service delivery model continues to evolve, some examples of initiatives that have been implemented or are underway include:

- Creating a local intake and application model to align with the Province's Centralized and Automated Intake approach.
- Enhancing outreach and mobile services.
- Expanding partnerships and service locations.
- Opening the Catherine St. Community Service Hub.
- Utilizing an integrated consent to remove barriers and facilitate access to services.

### **Financial Implications**

With the implementation of Employment Services Transformation in Ottawa in January 2024, the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services will transfer a portion of the Ontario Works Program Delivery Funding to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

The reduction in Provincial funding equates to a 22 per cent (\$9.019 million) budget reduction. This funding reduction has been mitigated through a reorganization and reduction of the management structure in Employment and Social Services as well as the removal of the funding previously allocated for the delivery of employment services and employment support financial benefits to residents.

Starting in January 2024, Employment Ontario service providers will be responsible for issuing employment related financial supports for all residents accessing their services, including social assistance recipients. Ottawa has also realigned \$1.5 million of one hundred per cent Provincial funding to establish a Stability Support Benefit to assist residents who are not yet ready for a referral to Employment Ontario. In addition, other Ontario Works mandatory and discretionary benefits will be maximized to support an individual's person-centered support needs.

Ontario Works Delivery Agents have always been required to meet Provincially defined performance outcomes; failure to achieve the set targets can result in a 15 per cent reduction in one hundred per cent Provincial Program Delivery Funding. In 2024, the Province will implement new performance outcomes and associated targets that reflect the municipalities new accountabilities in the social assistance system. As 2024 is considered a transition year, there will not be any financial penalties to Ontario Works funding if targets are not met in the first year of implementation.

### **Public Consultation/Input**

Employment and Social Services has engaged both community partners and residents with lived experience as the social assistance modernization and transformation agenda has evolved.

In 2021, a Social Assistance Community Advisory Group was launched and included 32 members representing a cross-sector of community partner organizations, who shared their expertise from a system-wide perspective to inform the development of the service delivery model. Staff continue to engage with the membership, providing updates on progress locally as well as the with the Provincial vision.

In the summer of 2023, staff engaged a broad range of partners to identify opportunities for collocation and interest in expansion of our outreach and mobile services. Discussions will take place with interested parties in the fall of 2023.

In August 2023, a survey was launched in seven languages to residents accessing Employment and Social Services programs to have the client voice inform the continued evolution of the service delivery model.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

### **Hypothèse et analyse**

En février 2021, le gouvernement provincial a annoncé sa vision du nouveau système

d'aide sociale en Ontario, laquelle prévoit une transformation des rôles provinciaux et municipaux liés à la prestation des programmes d'aide sociale. En octobre 2021, le Comité et le Conseil ont reçu le rapport [Mise à jour sur la modernisation, la transformation et l'intégration de l'aide sociale](#) (ASC2021-CSS-GEN-014), qui donnait un aperçu du plan du gouvernement provincial et des préparatifs mis en place à l'échelle locale.

Le présent rapport fait le point sur la mise en œuvre de trois grandes initiatives de transformation provinciales et souligne les changements apportés au modèle local de prestation de services afin de s'aligner sur la vision du gouvernement provincial concernant l'aide sociale, les services d'emploi et les priorités locales et d'obtenir le rendement attendu dont sera tributaire le financement du gouvernement provincial dans l'avenir. En outre, la mise en œuvre de la transformation des services d'emploi en Ontario entraîne pour Ottawa une réduction de 22 pour cent du financement de la prestation de programmes en 2024. Ce rapport fait état des répercussions de la réduction du financement et présente des stratégies d'atténuation.

La vision du gouvernement provincial de la transformation de l'assistance sociale en Ontario repose sur un plan pluriannuel visant la création d'un système efficient, efficace et rationalisé qui est axé sur les besoins uniques des personnes et qui élimine les obstacles à l'emploi. Le gouvernement a mis l'accent sur trois volets de son programme de transformation :

### **Admission centralisée et automatisée**

Les Ontariens et les Ontariennes qui ont besoin d'aide sociale présentent une demande en ligne ou par téléphone au moyen d'un processus centralisé et géré par la province assuré par l'Unité de la réception des demandes et de l'administration des prestations (URDAP). Les personnes qui déposent une demande se voient ensuite assigner un bureau local pour le suivi. Lors du lancement de l'URDAP, l'objectif était d'y traiter 70 pour cent de toutes les demandes d'aide d'Ontario au travail et d'en diriger 30 % vers les municipalités, laissant ainsi au personnel municipal plus de temps à consacrer aux services de soutien à la stabilité centrés sur la personne. Jusqu'à maintenant, l'URDAP n'a pas atteint l'objectif de 70 pour cent. Les gains d'efficacité et la réduction des tâches administratives attendus n'ont par conséquent pas été pleinement réalisés, et il y a aussi eu des répercussions sur l'expérience des résidents.

Des ajustements ont été apportés au modèle local d'admission des demandes de sorte à accorder la priorité aux résidents, à leurs besoins et à leur expérience de service tout en allégeant la charge de travail administratif du personnel afin de soutenir les activités

à incidence élevée. Le personnel collabore régulièrement avec le gouvernement provincial afin de lui faire part des expériences d'Ottawa quant au modèle d'admission centralisée et d'élaborer des solutions.

### **Transformation des services d'emploi**

La transformation des services d'emploi (TSE) crée un modèle d'emploi intégré dans lequel tous les services d'emploi en Ontario, y compris ceux qui étaient jusque-là fournis par Ontario au travail et le Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées (POSPH), sont fournis par Emploi Ontario. Le ministère du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences a désigné des gestionnaires de système de services (GSS) qui sont responsables de la planification, de la conception et de la prestation des services d'emploi. Le gestionnaire de système de services pour la région d'Ottawa est WCG International Consultants Ltd.

À Ottawa, la TSE sera mise en œuvre en janvier 2024, l'année 2023 étant une année de planification et de préparation. Le personnel a entretenu des rapports avec d'autres municipalités ayant pris part aux phases précédentes de la mise en œuvre de la TSE afin d'apprendre de leurs expériences. Il collabore aussi activement avec le GSS en vue d'assurer la continuité des services d'emploi pour les bénéficiaires de l'aide sociale au moment du lancement du nouveau modèle.

La Ville d'Ottawa joue deux rôles dans la transformation des services d'emploi : celui d'agent de prestation du programme Ontario au travail responsable de procéder à l'évaluation des bénéficiaires de l'aide sociale et de les aiguiller vers Emploi Ontario pour qu'ils obtiennent de l'aide dans le cadre des activités liées à l'emploi, puis celui de fournisseur de services d'Emploi Ontario dans le nouveau modèle d'emploi intégré.

### **Services de soutien à la stabilité centrés sur la personne**

Ontario au travail demeure un programme axé sur l'emploi qui fournit une aide financière à court terme pour faciliter la transition à l'emploi et aider les personnes à devenir autonomes. Des données anecdotiques indiquent qu'environ 30 pour cent des clients d'Ontario au travail sont prêts à être aiguillés vers Emploi Ontario, tandis que les autres ont besoin de services de soutien ciblés axés sur leurs besoins pour les aider à se préparer à l'emploi.

Dans le nouveau système d'aide sociale, le rôle municipal est de fournir des services de soutien à la stabilité centrés sur la personne, ce qui comprend la gestion des cas et la navigation dans les systèmes. La municipalité doit fournir une aide globale en mettant les personnes en contact avec les services municipaux et communautaires appropriés

pour satisfaire leurs besoins uniques, améliorer leur situation et éliminer les obstacles à l'emploi.

Dans le nouveau modèle d'emploi, la province exige l'utilisation de l'Outil d'évaluation commun et plan d'action. Le personnel d'Ontario au travail et d'Emploi Ontario aura recours à cet outil afin d'appuyer les services globaux, la planification de la gestion intégrée des cas, le suivi et l'atteinte des objectifs.

Les municipalités s'occuperont aussi de fournir des services de soutien à la stabilité centrés sur la personne et de l'aiguillage vers Emploi Ontario pour les adultes non handicapés qui font partie d'une cellule familiale bénéficiant du POSPH. Le personnel travaille avec le bureau du POSPH d'Ottawa pour comprendre l'étendue du groupe de clients, élaborer un plan pour l'aiguillage aux Services sociaux et d'emploi et établir des processus opérationnels connexes en vue d'assurer des mesures de soutien coordonnées.

### **Planification du modèle de prestation de services**

Les Services sociaux et d'emploi ont revu leur approche en matière de prestation de services afin de s'aligner sur la transformation de l'aide sociale et des services d'emploi et de favoriser la prestation de mesures de soutien et de services centrés sur la personne. Le secteur d'activité met au point des approches de prestation de services tout en veillant à ce que l'accès soit simple et à ce qu'il soit facile de se retrouver dans le système. Le modèle de prestation de services est toujours en évolution, mais certaines initiatives ont été mises en œuvre ou sont en cours, dont les suivantes :

- Création d'un modèle d'admission et de demande correspondant à l'approche d'admission centralisée et automatisée du gouvernement provincial
- Amélioration des services mobiles et d'intervention
- Élargissement des partenariats et des points de service
- Ouverture du Carrefour de services communautaires de la rue Catherine
- Utilisation d'un consentement intégré afin d'éliminer des obstacles et de faciliter l'accès aux services

### **Répercussions financières**

Dans le cadre de la Transformation des services d'emploi à Ottawa en janvier 2024, le ministère des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires transférera une part du financement de la prestation du programme Ontario au travail au ministère du Travail, de l'Immigration, de la Formation et du Développement des

compétences.

La réduction du financement provincial équivaut à une réduction du budget de 22 pour cent (9,019 millions de dollars). Cette diminution est atténuée par une réorganisation et une réduction de la structure de gestion au sein des Services sociaux et d'emploi ainsi que par le retrait du financement précédemment alloué pour la prestation de services d'emploi et d'aide financière de soutien à l'emploi fournis aux résidents.

À partir de janvier 2024, les fournisseurs de services d'Emploi Ontario seront responsables du versement de soutien financier lié à l'emploi pour toutes les personnes qui bénéficient de leurs services, y compris les bénéficiaires de l'aide sociale. Ottawa a également réaffecté une somme de 1,5 million de dollars de l'ensemble du financement provincial pour l'établissement de prestations de soutien à la stabilité afin de venir en aide aux résidents qui ne sont pas encore prêts pour l'aiguillage vers Emploi Ontario. De plus, les autres prestations obligatoires et discrétionnaires d'Ontario au travail seront maximisées pour répondre aux besoins individuels en matière de soutien.

Les agents de prestation d'Ontario au travail ont toujours eu à atteindre des résultats définis par la province; l'incapacité d'atteindre les objectifs établis peut entraîner une réduction de 15 pour cent de la totalité du financement de la prestation du programme provincial. En 2024, le gouvernement provincial mettra en place de nouveaux résultats attendus et objectifs correspondants qui refléteront les nouvelles responsabilités des municipalités dans le système d'aide sociale. Comme 2024 est considérée comme une année de transition, aucune pénalité financière ne sera appliquée au financement d'Ontario au travail si les objectifs ne sont pas atteints au cours de la première année.

### **Consultations publiques et commentaires**

Les Services sociaux et d'emploi ont consulté des partenaires du milieu et des résidents ayant une expérience vécue à mesure que progressait le plan de modernisation et de transformation de l'aide sociale.

En 2021, un Groupe consultatif communautaire sur l'aide sociale a été mis sur pied, formé de 32 membres représentant des organisations communautaires partenaires de différents secteurs. Ces derniers ont fait part de leur expertise d'une perspective d'ensemble afin d'orienter l'élaboration du modèle de prestation de services. Le personnel continue de collaborer avec les membres du groupe et les tient au courant des progrès réalisés à l'échelle locale ainsi que de la vision provinciale.

Au cours de l'été 2023, le personnel a fait appel à un large éventail de partenaires afin de cerner les possibilités de colocalisation et de sonder l'intérêt pour un élargissement des services mobiles et d'intervention. Des discussions se tiendront avec les parties intéressées à l'automne 2023.

En août 2023, un sondage accessible en sept langues a été lancé auprès des personnes bénéficiant des programmes des Services sociaux et d'emploi afin que leurs expériences puissent guider l'évolution continue du modèle de prestation de services.

## **BACKGROUND**

In October, 2021, Committee and Council received the [Social Assistance Modernization, Transformation and Integration Update report](#) (ASC2021-CSS-GEN-014). The report provided an overview of the Province's plan to transform the delivery of Social Assistance in Ontario, as described in their vision paper, [Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation](#), as well as the work underway locally to prepare for the transformation initiatives and modernization agenda.

There are two Social Assistance programs in Ontario:

- Ontario Works (OW): Delivered by municipalities, OW provides short term employment and financial assistance to people in need.
- The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP): Delivered by the Province of Ontario, for resident with disabilities who require longer term financial assistance and supports to employment, where possible.

The Province's Vision is to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focusses on people's unique needs and address barriers to employment and independence. The multi-year plan includes:

- Process, policy and technology changes to improve the client experience, make services easier to navigate and reduce administrative tasks so municipal staff can focus on high-impact person-centred services.
- Shifting Provincial-Municipal roles in the delivery of Social Assistance to streamline the delivery of key functions and align them where it makes the most sense.

The Province is committed to its vision for a transformed social assistance system in Ontario and is focused on the following areas of transformation:

- **Centralized and Automated Intake:** Centralizing the financial eligibility and issuance components of both OW and ODSP with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.
- **Employment Services Transformation:** An integrated employment model to meet the needs of job seekers, businesses and communities in Ontario. All employment services, including those historically delivered by OW and ODSP will be delivered by Employment Ontario and lead by regional service system managers, resulting in a single employment system.
- **Person-Centred Stability Supports:** Provided by the municipality, this role includes providing case management and systems navigation to social assistance recipients to prepare and enable them to participate in employment services and employment.

This report will provide an update on these specific transformation initiatives in Ottawa, including financial and other implications. The report will also highlight the changes being implemented to the local service delivery model to respond to the shifting municipal role in the delivery of Social Assistance and to ensure responsive and simplified access to services for residents in need.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Centralized and Automated Intake**

As part of the Province's plan to streamline the delivery of key functions in the social assistance system and align them where it makes the most sense, the Province is centralizing the financial eligibility and issuance components of both Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) under the responsibility of the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services (MCCSS).

As a first step, a Centralized and Automated Intake (CAI) model prototype was implemented in 2020, which included the launch of an Intake and Administrative Benefits Administrative Unit (IBAU). Ontarians applying for social assistance apply online or over the phone through the IBAU. The model, which uses a risk-based eligibility approach, is intended to provide faster eligibility decisions and initial social assistance payments. The individual is then assigned to a local office for follow up. High-risk and more complex applications for assistance, such as individuals in crisis or requiring interpretation services, continue to be directed to the local Ontario Works Office to be assessed for eligibility.

When launched, the IBAU was expected to complete 70 per cent of all applications for Ontario Works Assistance, with 30 per cent being directed to the municipality. This

aligned with the vision to reduce administrative tasks at the municipal level, allowing more time for staff to focus on the person-centred stability support role.

### **Local experience:**

Ottawa began participating in the CAI model in April 2021 and have been a collaborative partner working with the Ministry to achieve their intended goals. To date, the efficiencies and reduction in administrative tasks have not been fully realized.

The IBAU has not yet achieved 70 per cent application completion. In 2022, staff in Ottawa completed 78 per cent of applications for Ontario Works Assistance and as of August 2023, have completed 76 per cent.

The experience for the resident has also been impacted. The two-step process results in the need to tell their story multiple times to multiple people, along with confusion about who the primary point of contact is. Many individuals are waiting longer for an eligibility decision (more than four days, which is a Provincial service standard) and to receive their first payment. Incorrect eligibility decisions at the application phase have also impacted residents resulting in overpayments and underpayments; sometimes further exasperating a crisis.

Based on resident and staff feedback, adjustments have been made to our local application and intake model to prioritize the resident, their needs and their service experience as well as to reduce some of the administrative workload for staff, allowing space for relationship development and a focus on person-centred stability support.

Staff engage regularly with the Province, through multiple avenues to share Ottawa's experience related to the CAI prototype and to find solutions. This includes collectively with our municipal partners via the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA), and with MCCSS directly via joint project meetings. The Province continues to receive the feedback and adjust the centralized model.

### **Employment Services Transformation**

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development is implementing Employment Services Transformation (EST); creating an integrated employment model that aligns the delivery of all employment programs and services in the province to Employment Ontario (EO). This includes integrating social assistance employment assistance programs that have historically been part of the mandate of Ontario Works and ODSP.

The vision for EST is a locally responsive, outcome-based employment services system that meets the diverse needs of employers and job seekers across the full spectrum of employment readiness. The anticipated outcomes include:

- Diverse clientele get the right services and supports when they need them.
- Employers find the right workers with the right skills.
- Clients find and keep good jobs.
- Clients decrease reliance on Social Assistance.
- Sustainable, efficient and performance-based system; accountable for results.

The planning, design and delivery of employment services is the responsibility of regional service system managers (SSM) who are selected by the Ministry through a competitive process. Announced in early 2023, WCG International Consultants Ltd (WCG) is the SSM for the Ottawa catchment area.

The Province began implementing EST in phases starting with three prototype regions in 2019. Ottawa is part of Phase two and will transition to EST in January 2024. Twenty twenty-three has been a planning and preparation year for both the SSM and Employment and Social Services. Staff have been liaising with municipalities who were part of earlier implementation phases to learn from their experiences, as well as actively engaging with the SSM during this transition period to ensure the continuity of employment services for social assistance recipients.

The City of Ottawa has dual roles in Employment Service Transformation; as an Ontario Works Delivery Agent, it is responsible for assessing and referring social assistance recipients to Employment Ontario (EO) for assistance with employment activities, and as an EO Service Provider in the new integrated employment model.

### **City of Ottawa Employment Ontario**

There are nine EO service providers in Ottawa, whose mandate is to help all Ontarians find sustainable employment and provides a single point of access to employment and training programs and services for individuals and employers. The City of Ottawa has been an Employment Ontario provider since 2010. The main service location is at 370 Catherine Street, collocated with the Employment and Social Services Centre and Catherine St. Community Service Hub. A satellite location also operates from the Employment and Social Services Centre at the Beacon Hill Shopping Centre on Ogilvie Road.

Employment Ontario is funded one hundred per cent by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills development. The 2023-2024 budget for EO is \$2.289 million, which includes administrative, operational and client/employer supports funding.

Each year, EO service providers submit a business plan to the Ministry, which includes budget and program targets. Achievement of the set targets is a key consideration in continuing to be an EO Service Provider. The EO business plan and budget for 2024-2025 was submitted to the Service System Manager in September, with confirmation of the budget being anticipated in October 2023.

In 2024 and beyond, EO funding will include a combination of earned performance-based funding, fixed operating funding and employment related financial supports for residents and employers. Staff anticipate that the City of Ottawa will be approved as an EO Service provider in 2024 given our experience and positive record of providing effective employment services to residents. In particular, the City of Ottawa Employment Ontario is experienced in providing employment services to individuals receiving social assistance and offering the support needed to enable individuals facing complex barriers to achieve employment and financial self-sufficiency.

### **Person-Centred Stability Supports**

Despite the removal of employment services delivery from the mandate of Ontario Works, it remains an employment focused program, providing short-term financial assistance while helping people transition to employment and become self-sufficient.

Individuals in receipt of social assistance may face multiple barriers to employment such as the lack of safe and affordable housing and food insecurity, health, mental health and addiction challenges, lack of recent work experience or language barriers.

Anecdotal information from municipalities who are now working in the new integrated employment model indicates that approximately 30 per cent of the Ontario Works caseload is ready for referral to Employment Ontario. Others require focused, person-centred stability supports to help them ready for employment and still others will require a combination of both.

Ontario Works staff will be responsible for delivering case management and system navigation services that focus on connecting people to municipal and community-based services and supports, unique to the individual's needs. Person-centred stability supports are intended to improve a person's circumstances by:

- Addressing needs to increase independence.

- Connecting them to their community.
- Enabling them to participate in employment services and eventually employment.

These wrap arounds supports and services are ones that address:

- Crisis and safety: financial support, housing, crisis resolution.
- Health: access to health supports and benefits including mental health and addiction.
- Life skills: self-sufficiency, education and literacy, language, and numeracy support.
- Community supports: access to child care or caregiving supports, immigration and settlement services, cultural connections and justice and legal support.

Historically, in the delivery of social assistance programs, staff have always provided case management and systems navigation support, while at the same time determining and monitoring financial eligibility and supporting residents to find employment. With this defined scope in responsibly, work has been undertaken to:

- Enhance community partnerships in support of integrated and wrap around services.
- Develop a service delivery model that aligns with the community's priorities, our role of delivering person-centred supports and building staff capacity to focus on these high impact activities.
- Provide staff with training that is focused on the components of person-centred stability supports and increasing awareness of the organizations and services in our community.

Staff are well positioned to conduct this more streamlined role under a person-centred stability support framework.

### **Common Assessment and Action Plan**

The Common Assessment and Action Plan (CAAT) is a tool that is mandated for use by the Province and will be used by both Ontario Works Staff and Employment Ontario in the new employment model, to support integrated case management planning, monitoring and goal achievement.

The Common Assessment is a questionnaire used to identify an individual's skills and strengths, as well as to assess their person-centred support needs. The Action Plan identifies the steps the person will take to address their stability support needs and/or achieve their employment goals.

Individuals who are assessed as referral ready will begin to receive employment support via an Employment Ontario service provider. The CAAT supports integrated case management between Ontario Works and Employment Ontario staff and will be key to providing continuous, wrap around services to individuals to help them achieve their goals.

### **Adult family members receiving ODSP**

Historically, non-disabled adults who are part of a family unit receiving ODSP were referred to Ontario Works to access employment assistance programs. With the implementation of Employment Services Transformation, these individuals will be referred to Ontario Works to complete the Common Assessment, to provide case management and person-centred stability supports and referral to Employment Ontario when ready. Staff have begun working with the Ottawa ODSP office to understand the scope of the client group, develop a plan for referring to Employment and Social Services, as well as related business processes to ensure coordinated supports.

### **Service Delivery Model Planning**

Employment and Social Services has been re-organizing its service delivery approach in order to align to Social Assistance and Employment Transformation and to be successful in our role in delivering person-centred supports and services and to achieve performance outcomes that will be directly tied to future funding from the Province. The Service Area is developing innovative approaches to service delivery, while ensuring that access is simple and easy to navigate and provides the services when and where people need them the most. Examples of initiatives that have been implemented or are underway include:

- **Enhancing Outreach and Mobile Services:** A team of Ontario Works staff bring person-centred supports, programs, and services directly to residents in the community. On average, 185 residents access the team each month at 13 locations in the community. Our partner feedback has been positive, with more requesting the team's presence at their locations.
- **Expanding partnerships and service locations:** Outreach and engagement with community partners to identify opportunities for colocation, expansion of our outreach and mobile services or to welcome partner services into Employment and Social Service office spaces. These opportunities will increase the availability of programs and services to residents across the city, simplifying access to services.
- **Catherine St. Community Service Hub:** In 2023, the Hub has seen over 2,000 resident visits each month. The Hub provides integrated and coordinated City and

community services in one location. Currently, the Hub partners with seven community organizations to provide their services onsite. This includes the Centretown Community Food Centre, which collocated with the Hub in May 2023, improving access to food and food resources to residents in the Centretown area.

- Integrated Consent prototype: The Community and Social Services (CSS) department is implementing an Integrated Consent prototype to improve the exchange of common information between CSS programs, to remove barriers and facilitate access to services.

The service delivery model continues to evolve while ensuring we remain nimble to adjust as the Province's vision for social assistance modernization continues to be implemented.

### **Funding and Performance Outcomes**

With the implementation of Employment Services Transformation in Ottawa, the Ministry of Community, Children and Social Services will transfer a portion of the Ontario Works Program Delivery Funding, allocated for the delivery of employment services, to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. Program Delivery Funding is a combination of one hundred per cent Provincial funding and 50/50 per cent cost shared funding with the municipality. This funding is used for the cost of administration as well as funding employment benefits to social assistance recipients to support their employment goals. In 2023, \$41 million of the Program Delivery Funding was one hundred per cent Provincial funding.

The funding reduction equates to a 22 per cent (\$9.019 million) reduction in Provincial funding effective January 2024. This reduction has been mitigated through several strategies including a review and reduction of the management structure in Employment and Social Services as well as the removal of the funding previously allocated for the delivery of employment services and employment support financial benefits to residents.

Employment support financial benefits, provided to residents as part of Ontario Works employment services, help remove barriers to achieving employment goals. This could include funds to assist with the cost of transportation, clothing and grooming expenses, books, or fees for school, as a few examples. Starting in January 2024, Employment Ontario service providers will be responsible for issuing employment related financial supports for all residents accessing their services, including social assistance recipients.

In order to mitigate the impact of this change on residents, Ottawa has realigned \$1.5 million of one hundred per cent Provincial funding to establish a local Stability Support

Benefit to assist residents who are not yet ready for a referral to Employment Ontario. In addition, other Ontario Works mandatory and discretionary benefits, including a Person-Centred participation benefit, will be maximized to support an individual’s person-centered support needs.

**Table 1: Benefit Coordination**

<b>Examples: Ontario Works - Social Assistance Benefits</b>	<b>Examples: Employment Ontario - Employment Services Financial Supports</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly basic needs and shelter allowance</li> <li>• Special Diet allowance</li> <li>• Housing benefits</li> <li>• Health-related benefits (e.g.: medication, emergency dental and dentures, vision care)</li> <li>• Health related transportation</li> <li>• Provincial Person-Centred Participation benefit</li> <li>• Local Stability Support benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clothing, grooming and equipment and supplies for work</li> <li>• Certification fees</li> <li>• Short-term training costs</li> <li>• Emergency or infrequent child care</li> <li>• Transportation for employment activities</li> <li>• Translation of international academic documents</li> </ul>

**Performance Funding Framework, Outcomes and Targets**

Ontario Works Delivery Agents have always been required to meet Provincially defined performance outcomes; failure to achieve the set targets can result in a 15 per cent reduction in one hundred per cent Provincial Program Delivery Funding. The Province has developed new performance outcomes that are reflective of our accountability to support residents on a path to employment. The performance outcomes are:

- Participation requirements: Ontario Works and ODSP non-disabled adults:
  - With an Action Plan
  - Referred to Employment Ontario
- Completed referrals to Employment Ontario
- Exits to employment: Ontario Works cases exiting to employment.
- Re-accessing Ontario Works: Cases that exit Ontario Works do not return to the program within one year.

The new performance outcomes and associated targets will be implemented and evaluated beginning in 2024. However, 2024 is considered a transition year and therefore there will not be any financial penalties to Ontario Works funding if targets are not met in the first year of implementation. Additional information about the Provincial funding framework has not yet been communicated.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with the report recommendations

### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments to receiving the report.

### **COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)**

As this is a city-wide report, there are no Ward Councillor comments.

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) COMMENTS**

Not currently applicable.

### **CONSULTATION**

Employment and Social Services has engaged with both community partners and residents with lived experience as the social assistance modernization and transformation agenda has evolved.

In 2021, a Social Assistance Community Advisory Group was launched and included 32 members representing a cross-sector of community partner organizations. Members shared their expertise and view from a system-wide perspective to inform the development of the service delivery model. While the groups' official function has sunset, staff continue to engage with the membership, providing updates on progress locally as well as the with the Provincial vision.

In the summer of 2023, staff engaged a broad range of partners to identify opportunities for collocation, interest in expansion of our outreach and mobile services or to welcome partner services into Employment and Social Service office spaces. Discussions with interested parties will take place in the fall of 2023 to inform new partnership opportunities and expansion of our programs and services into the community.

In August 2023, a survey was launched in seven languages to residents accessing Employment and Social Services programs in order to have the client voice inform the

continued evolution of the service delivery model. The survey assesses their level of satisfaction with the service delivery model and how and where they prefer to receive services.

## **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

The underpinning of Social Assistance Modernization and Transformation in Ontario is to create a more streamlined system for social assistance that puts people at the centre; where services work together to support residents and where residents can access services when and where they need them.

The municipal role in the delivery of social assistance in Ontario is focused on delivering Person-Centred Stability Supports and working hand in hand with residents, including many people with disabilities, to address and breakdown barriers they are facing to wellbeing, employment, and greater independence.

Currently in Employment and Social Services (ESS), the service delivery approach is designed with the resident experience in mind, which includes ease of navigation and is fully accessible:

- Services are provided both virtually, by telephone and in-person, based on the resident's choice.
- Mobile services bring staff into the community, closer to where residents live, in areas where they are most familiar and comfortable.
- Residents have choice of how, when and where they receive services.
- The Catherine St. Community Service Hub provides integrated and wrap-around municipal and community services in one accessible location.
- Digital service options are available to improve the resident's experience by making services easier to navigate and more accessible. Examples include reloadable payment cards, MyBenefits online services, and paperless strategies.

As it relates to Employment Services Transformation, the Ministry has standards and expectations for the Service System Manager regarding service delivery for people with disabilities, including establishing service levels, participating in labour market attachment discussions, and engaging with disability-related organizations and employers to support successful employment outcomes.

Staff in ESS have also completed the AODA Accessibility for All training, which covers the legislative requirements of the organization, including the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* and the

Ontario Human Rights Code, as it relates to the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities. As such, staff will apply this training to their work as the service delivery model continues to evolve.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

There are no asset management implications as a result of this report.

### **CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

There are not climate implications as a result of this report.

### **DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY IMPLICATIONS**

The Ontario Works Act, 1997, identifies that the Minister of the Community and Social Services designates a Delivery Agent, for each geographic area in the province, to administer the Act and provide social assistance in the area. The Delivery Agent appoints an Administrator to oversee the administration of the Act. The City of Ottawa, Delegation of Authority By-law no. 2023-002, Schedule D, Section Five, delegates the authority to perform the role of Administrator under the Ontario Works Act to the General Manager, Community and Social Services and the Director, Employment and Social Services.

Additionally, section five authorizes the Director, Employment and Social Services and the Program Manager, Employment Strategy Branch, to enter into agreements with the Federal and Provincial government, related to employment and social services and consistent with the departmental mandate and are at no cost to the City with the exception of associated operational and administrative costs that are within approved budgets.

### **ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS**

There are no economic implications associated with this report or its recommendations.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no environment implications associated with this report or its recommendations.

### **INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS**

Employment and Social Services (ESS) continues to use an equity, inclusion, and reconciliation approach in preparing for our new roll in the delivery of social assistance

and in the evolution of our service delivery model; ensuring all residents have access to culturally appropriate, quality and timely services.

In the delivery of Person-Centred Stability Supports as well as in all programs and services, ESS employs a Client-Centric Approach, which:

- Places the individual at the centre of all interactions.
- Acknowledges, respects, and builds upon the individual's knowledge, experiences, ability and capacity.
- Seeks to balance the power differences that can exist between providers and recipients of services.
- Utilizes a trauma-informed approach to increase feelings of safety, trust and increased connection and relationship development.

Employment and Social Services has and continues to engage with a broad cross-sector of community organizations to:

- Share the Province's vision for social assistance in Ontario.
- Inform the development of the local service delivery model,
- Identify opportunities for service collaboration that will remove barriers and increase access to service, to meet the needs of all Ottawa residents.

This engagement includes organizations who provide services related to housing and homelessness, child care, children and families, food security, newcomer settlement services, health and community resource centres, youth programs, Francophone services and Indigenous services.

In addition, ESS is also a part of the United Way funded Indigenous Employment Leadership Table, raising our awareness of Indigenous community employment needs and culturally appropriate and necessary approaches to employment service delivery.

In regard to Employment Services Transformation, the Ministry intends to work with partners to define key performance indicators specific to Black and Racialized people. Additionally, the Service System Manager for Employment has committed to ensuring their organization and their employment service providers are trained and kept current in Indigenous Cultural Competency, to building partnerships with Indigenous Organization and ensuring that Indigenous residents are referred to Indigenous organization of their choice for services.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

Staff continue to assess the financial and client service delivery risks as social assistance modernization and transformation is implemented. Risks are managed by the appropriate staff.

### **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no rural implications resulting from the recommendations of this report.

As the service delivery model for social assistance evolves, the unique needs of rural residents are considered, and service providers are engaged for partnership development opportunities in order to ensure simplified access to services for rural residents. Social Assistance and person-centred stability support is available for all Ottawa residents, including those residing in rural areas.

### **TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS**

There are not technology implications associated with this report

### **TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

This report is related to the following strategic priority: A city that has affordable housing and is more livable for all. Specifically, to strategic objective six: Simplify access to social services to support those in need, including housing, employment and child care services.

### **DISPOSITION**

Staff will implement any direction from Committee resulting from this information report.