

**SUBJECT: Social Assistance Modernization, Transformation, and Integration
Update**

File Number: ACS2021-CSS-GEN-0014

**Report to Community and Protective Services Committee on 21 October 2021
and Council 27 October 2021**

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**by Clara Freire, Director Employment and Social Services, Community and Social
Services**

**Contact Person: Clara Freire, Director, Employment and Social Services,
Community and Social Services**

613-580-2424 ext 15868, clara.freire@ottawa.ca

Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE

**OBJET: Mise à jour sur la modernisation, la transformation et l'intégration de
l'aide sociale**

Dossier : ACS2021-CSS-GEN-014

Rapport au Comité des services communautaires et de protection

le 21 octobre 2021

et au Conseil le 27 octobre 2021

Soumis le 12 octobre 2021

**Par Clara Freire, Directrice, Services Sociaux et d'emploi, Services sociaux et
communautaires**

**Personne ressource: Clara Freire, Directrice, Services Sociaux et d'emploi,
Services sociaux et communautaires**

613-580-2424 ext 15868, clara.freire@ottawa.ca

Quartier : CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Community and Protective Services Committee recommend that council receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**Assumption and Analysis:**

In February 2021, the Province announced its vision for a renewed Social Assistance system in Ontario. The multi-year plan (2020 – 2024) includes a considerable shift in Provincial-Municipal roles and responsibilities in the delivery of Social Assistance.

This report provides an overview of the changes to roles and responsibilities related to the delivery of Social Assistance programs in Ontario, how City staff are engaged in a collaborative co-design process with the Province and the foreseeable opportunities and impacts of this modernization process to the services provided by Employment and Social Services, Community and Social Services Department.

Currently, the province and municipalities both provide all elements of their respective programs, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) respectively, to their specific client groups. Social Assistance Modernization moves away from an everyone does everything approach, to align functions where they make the most sense.

Over time, the financial eligibility and issuance components for both OW and ODSP will be centralized and become the responsibility of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). Municipalities will perform a life stabilization case management and system navigation role in the new system. This includes working with individuals to understand their needs and supporting them to develop a plan to overcome barriers to meeting their goals, while also connecting them to the systems of supports available in their community.

In addition, Ontario Works employment services are being transferred to Employment Ontario, which will provide one system for delivery of all employment programs and services for all Ontarians. Employment Ontario services will be managed by one Service System Manager per Region and funded by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Ottawa is well positioned to assume the role of life stabilization and systems navigation. Aligning this role with municipalities acknowledges our skills and expertise, relationships

with the local community social service sector as well as our role in delivering housing and childcare programs and services, which are essential supports in life stabilization and maintaining employment.

Notwithstanding the changes, ESS will continue to administer municipally funded benefits to eligible Ottawa residents. This includes the Essential Health and Social Supports program and Housing Benefits. OW clients and other eligible residents will continue to benefit from integrated ESS services.

The Ministry is engaging with municipal partners in a collaborative co-design approach to realize its vision. The approach also includes prototyping elements of the new model in different municipalities to test and learn from the design and concept before full implementation. The Province's plan will see implementation of the new Social Assistance delivery model throughout 2022 and 2023 ending in 2024. This new service delivery model will also include new funding, performance and accountability frameworks. These are expected to be introduced by 2023.

Employment and Social Services (ESS) has taken steps to prepare for the changes described in this report and has been actively involved in implementing and prototyping new service elements, as well as informing the design of the new Social Assistance service model in Ontario. To align to the new provincial vision, ESS is re-organizing its service delivery approach, leveraging what we have learned from Covid-19 and integrating input from staff, clients, and community partners.

While Social Assistance Modernization looks at multiple aspects of the program design and delivery, the process does not include a review or adjustment of the current Social Assistance rates or a review to streamline and simplify the myriad of rules that govern Social Assistance in Ontario.

The Province's longer-term vision beyond 2024 is Human Services Integration, which includes integrated, client-centric service access across provincial, municipal and community programs to connect people to the services they need.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a driver for the City of Ottawa toward Human Services Integration. Working together with community partners in response to the pandemic has confirmed a desire to come together to address the social and systemic inequities that have been highlighted; particularly the inequities experienced by Indigenous people, Black and racialized communities, women and gender diverse and equity deserving groups. Best practices have resulted from this collaborative work and these practices and relationships can be leveraged moving forward.

Staff will provide further updates to Committee and Council as the Provincial Social Assistance delivery model is finalized and as progress is made toward Human Services Integration locally.

Financial Implications:

As part of Employment Services Transformation (EST), current Ontario Works employment benefits and related administration funding will be removed from the Ontario Works budget and transferred to fund the new Service System Manager for Employment Ontario. Based on the experiences of early EST prototype municipalities, Ottawa is anticipating that the initial budget reduction will equate to a minimum of 20% of the current OW budget. Specific details on how the potential budget reduction will be applied to our overall OW budget are not known at this time. Any future budget implications will be presented to Council as part of the Budget process.

Public Consultation/Input:

Employment and Social Services is engaging community partners and clients with lived experience in preparing for the change of our service offerings from a financial and employment focus, to wrap around life stabilization supports.

A Social Assistance Community Advisory Group has been launched and includes 32 members representing a cross-sector of community partner organizations who contribute to a system-wide perspective to inform the development of a new Social Assistance model.

The Lived Experience Advisory Group will focus on how to increase wrap-around life stabilization supports for residents living on low incomes, on Ontario Works and over time those receiving Ontario Disability Support Program. This group will provide valuable insights from a first-person perspective.

The Province has also initiated engagement sessions with community service providers, Ontario Works and ODSP recipients in Ottawa, ensuring their needs are reflected in the design of the future service delivery model. To date, approximately 70 local clients and community partners have provided input into the design of the new Social Assistance delivery model.

RÉSUMÉ

Hypothèse et analyse

En février 2021, le gouvernement provincial a annoncé sa vision du nouveau système d'aide sociale en Ontario. Le plan pluriannuel (2020–2024) prévoit un changement considérable des rôles et des responsabilités de la province et des municipalités dans la prestation de l'aide sociale.

Le présent rapport donne un aperçu des changements apportés aux rôles et aux responsabilités liés à la prestation des programmes d'aide sociale en Ontario, de la façon dont le personnel de la Ville participe à un processus de co-conception avec le gouvernement provincial, et des possibilités et des répercussions prévisibles de ce processus de modernisation sur les services offerts par les Services sociaux et

communautaires (SSE) et la Direction générale des services sociaux et communautaires (DGSSC).

À l'heure actuelle, le gouvernement provincial et les municipalités fournissent tous les éléments de leurs programmes respectifs, soit le Programme ontarien de soutien aux personnes handicapées (POSPH) et Ontario au travail (OT) respectivement, à leurs groupes de clients particuliers. La modernisation de l'aide sociale s'éloigne d'une approche à guichet unique pour harmoniser les fonctions de la façon la plus logique.

Au fil du temps, les composantes d'admissibilité financière et de délivrance pour le POSPH et OT seront centralisées et deviendront la responsabilité du ministère des Services à l'enfance et des Services sociaux et communautaires (MSESSC). Dans le nouveau système, les municipalités assumeront un rôle de gestion des cas en ce qui concerne la stabilisation de la vie et la navigation du système. Ce qui comprend, entre autres, collaborer avec des personnes afin de comprendre leurs besoins et les soutenir en vue de l'élaboration d'un plan visant à surmonter les obstacles à l'atteinte de leurs objectifs, tout en les mettant en contact avec les systèmes de soutien offerts dans leur communauté.

De plus, les services d'emploi d'OT seront transférés à Emploi Ontario, qui offrira un système unique pour la prestation de tous les programmes et services d'emploi pour l'ensemble des Ontariens et des Ontariennes. Les services d'Emploi Ontario seront gérés par un gestionnaire du système de services par région et seront financés par le ministère du Travail, de la Formation et du Développement des compétences (MTFDC).

Ottawa est bien placée pour assumer le rôle de stabilisation de la vie et de navigation des systèmes. L'harmonisation de ce rôle avec les municipalités tient compte de nos compétences et de notre expertise, de nos relations avec le secteur des services sociaux communautaires locaux ainsi que de notre rôle dans la prestation de programmes de services de logement et de garde d'enfants, qui sont des mesures de soutien essentielles à la stabilisation de la vie et au maintien de l'emploi.

Malgré les changements, les SSE continueront d'administrer les prestations financées par la Ville aux résidents admissibles d'Ottawa. Cela comprend le programme Soutiens essentiels de santé et de services sociaux et les prestations de logement. Les clients d'OT et les autres résidents admissibles continueront de bénéficier des services intégrés des SSE.

Le Ministère collabore avec ses partenaires municipaux à l'élaboration d'une approche de co-conception en vue de réaliser sa vision. L'approche comprend également le prototypage du nouveau modèle dans différentes municipalités afin de mettre à l'essai la conception et d'en tirer des leçons avant sa mise en œuvre complète. Le plan du gouvernement provincial prévoit que la mise en œuvre du nouveau modèle de prestation de l'aide sociale se déroula en 2022 et en 2023, et se terminera en 2024. Ce nouveau modèle de prestation de services comprendra également de nouveaux cadres

de financement, de rendement et de responsabilisation, lesquels seront mis en œuvre d'ici 2023.

Les SSE ont pris des mesures pour se préparer aux changements décrits dans le présent rapport et ont participé activement à la mise en œuvre et au prototypage de nouveaux éléments de services, ainsi qu'à la conception du nouveau modèle de services d'aide sociale en Ontario. Afin de s'adapter à la nouvelle vision provinciale, les SSE réorganisent leur approche de prestation de services en tirant parti des leçons apprises pendant la pandémie de COVID-19 et en intégrant les commentaires du personnel, des clients et des partenaires communautaires.

Bien que la modernisation de l'aide sociale porte sur de multiples aspects de la conception et de la prestation des programmes, le processus ne comprend pas un examen ou un ajustement des prestations d'aide sociale actuelles ni un examen visant à rationaliser ou à simplifier la multitude de règles qui régissent l'aide sociale en Ontario.

La vision à plus long terme de la province au-delà de 2024 est l'intégration des services à la personne, qui comprend un accès intégré et axé sur la clientèle à l'ensemble des programmes provinciaux, municipaux et communautaires afin de mettre les résidents en contact avec les services dont ils ont besoin.

La pandémie de COVID-19 a été un facteur déterminant pour la Ville d'Ottawa en ce qui concerne l'intégration des services à la personne. La collaboration avec les partenaires communautaires en réponse à la pandémie a confirmé un besoin de se réunir pour remédier aux inégalités sociales et systémiques qui ont été mises en lumière; en particulier, les inégalités dont sont victimes les Autochtones, les communautés noires et racisées, les femmes et les personnes aux diverses identités de genre, et les groupes en quête d'équité. Des pratiques exemplaires ont découlé de ce travail collaboratif; on pourra tirer parti de ces pratiques et de ces relations pour les initiatives à venir.

Le personnel présentera d'autres mises à jour au Comité et au Conseil au fur et à mesure que le modèle provincial de prestation de services d'aide sociale sera mis au point et que des progrès seront réalisés en ce qui a trait à l'intégration des services à la personne à l'échelle locale.

Répercussions financières

Dans le cadre de la transformation des services d'emploi, les prestations d'emploi d'OT et le financement administratif connexe actuels seront retirés du budget d'OT et transférés pour financer le nouveau poste de gestionnaire du système de services d'Emploi Ontario. En se fondant sur l'expérience des premières municipalités prototypes de la transformation des services d'emploi, Ottawa prévoit que la réduction budgétaire initiale équivaldra à au moins 20 % du budget actuel d'OT. On ne connaît pas encore les détails précis concernant la façon dont la réduction budgétaire

potentielle sera appliquée au budget global d'OT. Toute répercussion budgétaire future sera présentée au Conseil dans le cadre du processus budgétaire.

Consultations publiques et commentaires

Les SSE sollicitent la participation des partenaires communautaires et des clients ayant une expérience vécue dans la préparation au changement de nos offres de services, du point de vue de l'emploi et des finances, pour mettre au point des mesures de soutien globales à la stabilisation de la vie.

Un Groupe consultatif communautaire sur l'aide sociale a été mis sur pied et comprend 32 membres représentant des organisations communautaires partenaires de différents secteurs qui contribuent à l'élaboration d'un nouveau modèle d'aide sociale à l'échelle du système.

Le Groupe consultatif sur les expériences vécues mettra l'accent sur la façon d'accroître les mesures de soutien globales à la stabilisation de la vie pour les résidents à faible revenu qui sont bénéficiaires d'OT et, au fil du temps, ceux qui sont bénéficiaires du POSPH. Ce groupe fournira des renseignements précieux du point de vue des vrais utilisateurs.

BACKGROUND

In February 2021, the Province released their vision paper, "[Recovery and Renewal: Ontario's Vision for Social Assistance Transformation](#)"; that outlined their plan for a renewed Social Assistance system in Ontario. The vision: "To create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people, providing them with a range of services to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success so they can move towards employment and independence." Covid 19 impacts and recovery have accelerated the pace of implementation of this vision.

To enable their vision, the Province developed a multi-year plan (2020 – 2024) that includes realignment of provincial and municipal roles in the delivery of social and financial assistance. This realignment will see the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Service (MCCSS), assume responsibility for financial eligibility and monitoring for both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and municipalities will be responsible for Life Stabilization case management and systems navigation supports for both Ontario Works and ODSP recipients, as well as for any low-income residents in crisis. In addition, Ontario Works employment services are being re-aligned under one system for the delivery of all employment programs and services for all Ontarians under Employment Ontario (EO). Employment Ontario services will be managed by one Service System Manager per Region and funded by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

The longer-term vision beyond 2024 is Human Services Integration, which includes flexible and integrated client-centric service access across provincial, municipal and community programs to seamlessly connect people to the services they need.

The Ministry is engaging with municipal partners in a collaborative co-design approach to realize its vision. The approach also includes prototyping elements of the new model in different municipalities to test and learn from the design and concept before full implementation.

In April, proposed amendments to the Ontario Works Act were tabled in the Legislature and included:

- Changing program delivery designations to enable the realignment of Ontario Works delivery functions, whereby MCCSS is designated as a delivery agent (historically the role of the municipality in the Act) and municipalities designated as a delivery partner to the Ministry).
- Changing the definition of assistance to include employment and life stabilization assistance; updating the language to reflect the new life stabilization framework and employment activities as core components of the program.

The amendments also allow for the future testing and prototyping needed as the new Social Assistance delivery model evolves. Future amendments to the Ontario Works Act are planned in the coming months.

Employment and Social Services has been preparing over the past two years for these changes and their impact on operations and staffing. Furthermore, the Community and Social Services department has developed strategic priorities in support of human services integration across our programs and services.

DISCUSSION

Overview

Currently in Ontario there are two Social Assistance programs:

1. Ontario Works (OW): Administered by municipalities as the service manager, and locally by Employment and Social Services, OW provides short term employment and financial assistance to people in need; and

2. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP): Delivered by the Province of Ontario, for residents with disabilities who require longer term financial assistance and supports to employment, where possible.

The City of Ottawa is also one of nine local Employment Ontario service providers with a mandate to help all Ontarians find sustainable employment and to provide a single point of access to employment and training programs and services for individuals and employers.

Currently, the province and municipalities both provide all elements of their respective programs to their specific client groups. Social Assistance Modernization moves away from an everyone does everything approach, to align functions where they make the most sense.

Figure 1: Highlights of Current and Future State

Current State	Future State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Province (MCCSS) delivers ODSP financial support • Municipalities deliver OW financial and employment supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCCSS responsible for financial supports for both OW and ODSP programs • Municipalities responsible for Life Stabilization (case management) to employment; eventually including ODSP recipients and residents in need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Ontario provides employment and training programs; engages with employers • OW provides employment supports for social assistance recipients • Third party labour market research (funded) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Ontario services centralized per region (Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills development (MLTSD)). Includes all employment, training, employer engagement and related support including local labour market planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiquated systems, administratively heavy, myriad of rules and polices • Provincial Data Bases (SAMs and CAMs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client-centred, digital self-serve options, risk-based eligibility screening (simplified access)

Current State	Future State
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different eligibility determination practices across province 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal OW staff assess complex cases and complete follow up on all cases • One Common Assessment Tool between MCCSS and MLTSD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siloed policies and programs across MCCSS funded services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Services Integration across programs and services • More collaboration between Provincial ministries

Over time, the financial eligibility and benefit administration components for both OW and ODSP will be centralized and become the responsibility of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS). Only OW applications determined to be “high-risk” as well as other more complex cases (youth, self-employed, requiring an interpreter or in crisis and in immediate need) will continue to be assessed by municipalities through exiting channels. Municipalities will perform a life stabilization case management and systems navigation role in the new social assistance system. This includes working with individuals to understand their needs, building trust and supporting them to develop a personalized plan to overcome barriers to meeting their goals, while also connecting them to the broader systems of supports available in their community. This also means working in a more integrated and intentional manner with community service providers to best serve clients in common.

The way in which Ontario’s employment programs and services are delivered is also being transformed and includes transferring the Ontario Works employment services to Employment Ontario (EO), under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. Municipal staff will be a key client referral source to EO’s programs and services offerings, as part of their Life Stabilization role.

Notwithstanding the changes, ESS will continue to administer municipally funded benefits to eligible Ottawa residents. This includes the Essential Health and Social Supports program and Housing Benefits, administered in partnership with the Housing Branch as part of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). OW clients and other eligible residents will continue to benefit from integrated ESS services.

As provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities in the delivery of social assistance are realigned new funding, performance, and accountability models are also being

considered. The Province is indicating that new funding, performance and accountability frameworks will be introduced by 2023.

Co-design Process

The Province has committed to working in collaboration with municipal partners to co-design the new social assistance system in Ontario. This welcomed collaboration occurs via numerous Provincial-Municipal planning tables. Ottawa is represented at these tables by management members of the Community and Social Services department (CSSD), including the General Manager, CSSD and the Director, Employment and Social Services (ESS). Targeted engagement with front-line staff and clients with lived experience has also informed the co-design process. All of this engagement has been coordinated by ESS staff as part of the co-design process. The Province has hired Deloitte Canada to project manage the co-design phase and to provide recommendations for changes to the exiting service model.

The co-design is an iterative process with various elements of change being prototyped throughout. The current phase (summer through fall 2021) reviews and analyzes various layers of the new service model with a focus on provincial-municipal roles and responsibilities, the client journey and service channels and funding models. The next phase of the co-design (fall 2021 through 2022) will see a blueprint of the provincial service delivery model tested and refined through a prototyping approach with various municipalities. The Province's plan will see implementation of the new Social Assistance delivery model throughout 2022 and 2023 ending in 2024.

Key Changes and Implications

Social Assistance Modernization and Transformation consists of four key elements:

1. Digital Services Modernization
2. Centralized and Automated Intake
3. Employment Services Transformation
4. Life Stabilization

1. Digital Services Modernization

Since 2016 the province has been implementing process, policy and technology enabled changes to modernize the delivery of social assistance in Ontario. These changes improve the client experience by making services easier to navigate and more accessible. The improvements reduce administrative tasks so staff have more time to focus on the client. Some examples of the digital services and policy changes implemented to date include:

- Reloadable Payment Cards - an alternative to a physical cheque, this electronic form of payment supports clients who are unable to open a bank account. 97%

of Ottawa Ontario Works client payments are currently issued by Reloadable Payment Cards or Direct Bank Deposit.

- MyBenefits - an online service available 24/7 that gives clients the ability to access and update their social assistance file information anywhere, anytime and on any device. They are also now able to message chat their Caseworker through their MyBenefits self-serve account. Currently, 46% of the Ottawa OW caseload is registered for MyBenefits.
- Paperless by default strategy - MyBenefits users stop receiving paper documents by mail and access information through MyBenefits
- Simplified Income reporting – a policy change that reduced some monthly income reporting obligations
- Eliminating paper drug benefit cards – enabling clients to use their Ontario Health Card to access benefits like prescription drugs and eye exams.

Covid-19 has further enhanced our skills and abilities to provide virtual services. Yet, despite the benefits of digital modernization, we know that many people in our community experience digital access barriers. This can be due to financial, language, or other personal, systemic and societal challenges. To ensure equitable access to service, local Social Assistance services will continue to include phone and in person service options. Employment and Social Services is also piloting the enhancement of our mobile services, bringing our services to where people need us to be. Our future service model will include virtual, mobile and in person service options.

2. Centralized and Automated Intake

In the fall of 2020, as a first step in centralizing OW and ODSP financial assistance applications and eligibility decisions, the Province launched the Centralized and Automated Intake (CAI) model and created a Provincial Intake and Benefits Administrative Unit (IBAU).

Centralized and Automated Intake means that Ontarians in need of Social Assistance now apply online or via telephone, via the IBAU, and receive streamlined approval using a risk-based eligibility approach. Once eligibility has been determined at the IBAU, the client is assigned to the local office to perform post-application functions and to provide Life Stabilization services, including individualized case management, system navigation and employment readiness services and supports. Of note, applications determined to be “high-risk” as well as other more complex cases (youth, self-employed, requiring an interpreter or in crisis and in immediate need) will continue to be assessed by municipalities through existing channels. The Province has a target to

process 70% of all applications received at the IBAU, with 30% being diverted to the local office.

Centralized and Automated Intake was initially launched in seven municipalities as early prototype sites to pilot the new model with other municipalities being onboarded in phases. Ottawa was onboarded in April 2021. Since May 2021, Employment and Social Services (ESS) staff have processed 1189 applications and 598 post application activities.

To date the Province has achieved 30% processing of all applications from Ottawa.

Centralized and Automated intake is still in a prototype phase, which includes building, testing and continuous improvement. Staff from ESS and the Provincial IBAU staff have been working very collaboratively to address the issues created by this service delivery change. One key area of concern is client wait times for application processing and eligibility decisions. Ottawa has stressed to the Province the importance of maintaining and sustaining pre-CAI service standards, which includes providing an eligibility decision within four working days of receiving an application for Social Assistance. As a result of this advocacy, the Province has recently dedicated five IBAU staff to complete applications for Ottawa, while ESS staff also continue completing applications to ensure clients receive assistance in a timely manner. The Province has also delayed onboarding additional municipalities to the prototype at this time to address prototype challenges.

As part of our future Employment and Social Services service delivery model, we will review and identify a new intake service model, integrated with our Life Stabilization mandate.

3. Employment Services Transformation

In 2019, the Province announced their plan to transform Ontario's employment services by introducing a new model that would more effectively meet the needs of job seekers, businesses, and communities.

Employment Services Transformation (EST) includes a competitive process to select regional Service System Managers (SSMs) who will be responsible for the planning, design, and delivery of employment services in regional catchment areas across the province. The Ottawa catchment area includes: City of Ottawa, Prescott-Russell, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry, Leeds and Grenville and Lanark County. When EST is complete, Employment Ontario will provide all employment services under the management of the SSM, which includes integrating Ontario Works and ODSP employment Services.

In September 2020, Hamilton-Niagara, Muskoka-Kawarthas and Peel Region were identified as the first prototype sites for Employment Service Transformation. In these catchment areas, the successful SSMs were two private operators and one public sector operator (Academic). In June 2021, the Province announced their plan for

launching EST in the rest of the province, through a phased approach based on regional complexity, competitiveness, and municipal engagement. For the Ottawa catchment area, the SSM is expected to be chosen before 2023, following a Request for Qualification and call for proposal process.

The City of Ottawa has not applied to be a SSM but will instead seek to continue to be an Employment Ontario Service Provider when request for submissions for service providers are announced.

As part of Employment Services Transformation (EST), current Ontario Works employment benefits and related administration funding will be removed from the Ontario Works budget and transferred to fund the new Service System Manager for Employment Ontario. Based on the experiences of early EST prototype municipalities named above, Ottawa is anticipating that the initial budget reduction will equate to a minimum of 20% of the current OW budget.

Currently, the Ontario Works Program consists of Financial Assistance and what the Province refers to as the Ontario Works Contract. Financial Assistance is funded 100% by the Province and its budget in 2021 is \$137 million. The Ontario Works Contract provides funding for both administrative costs and program expenditures, which includes direct benefits to clients. A portion of the budget is fully funded by the Province and the rest is cost-shared between the Province and the City at 50 percent-50 percent. In 2021, the City of Ottawa Ontario Works Contract has a budget of \$68 million dollars. The portion that is fully funded by the Province is \$15 million and the 50 / 50 portion is \$53 million with the Province and the City each contributing \$26.5 million. The Province's total funding in the Ontario Works Contract is the sum of the \$15 million and the \$26.5 million (or \$41.5 million) and the City's funding in the Ontario Works Contract is \$26.5M

Specific details on how the potential budget reduction will be applied to the City's overall OW budget are not known at this time. The City is planning for EST to be launched in Ottawa in 2023 and planning for potential funding implications resulting from this change in 2023 or 2024.

Ottawa is in a unique position as both an OW and EO service provider, with a very good track record of providing employment services to people facing complex barriers. This experience will enable us to adjust to the new employment services model, while mitigating some of the initial impacts of a budget reduction. Significant planning is now underway and an update on these impacts will be included in the next update report to Council.

4. Life Stabilization

As the Province assumes responsibility for the financial assistance and eligibility components of both OW and ODSP programs, including ongoing eligibility, adjudication and some benefit administration, municipalities will focus on delivering person-centred

life stabilization supports. Life stabilization involves staff working with clients to identify and help address the barriers they are facing to wellbeing, employment, and greater independence. Areas of focus in life stabilization include:

Basic Needs:

- Housing
- Food security
- Crisis resolution

Community Supports:

- Childcare
- Cultural services
- Justice and legal services

Health:

- Primary Care
- Mental health and addictions
- Ongoing medical concerns

Life Skills:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- English/French as a second language
- Self-efficacy
- Basic education

Ontario Works staff delivering Life Stabilization as well as those delivering employment services through Employment Ontario will use a new integrated Common Assessment Tool, to collaborate on case management, support identification, assessment and planning for life stabilization and employment. The assessment helps to facilitate conversations with clients about their needs and barriers to build their life stabilization plan. Staff will then support the client by navigating and connecting them to community supports and services to implement their plan and achieve their goals.

In addition to providing life stabilization supports to Ontario Works recipients, municipal staff will eventually provide this support to ODSP recipients and any low-income resident in need. How ODSP recipients or residents will access life stabilization supports is still to be determined.

Pending approvals, the Province intends to prototype the proposed new service model in certain catchment areas to inform life stabilization services and how the centralized and automated intake, life stabilization and employment service functions work together as the new service model.

The whole of these changes is a significant departure from what has been the traditional role of municipalities in providing financial and social assistance. Centralizing functions as well as creating digital tools, reducing manual paper-based process and increased self-serve options intends to provide frontline staff more time to focus on interactions with clients to address their needs and support their path to employment and self-sufficiency.

Ottawa is well positioned to assume the role of life stabilization and systems navigation, as this is a role that has always gone hand-in-hand with delivering social assistance. Aligning this role with municipalities acknowledges our skills and expertise, relationships with the local community social service sector as well as our role in delivering housing and childcare programs and services.

Local Service Delivery Model Re-Design

As mentioned previously, Employment and Social Services (ESS) has taken steps to prepare for the changes described in this report and has been actively involved in implementing and prototyping new service elements as well as informing the design of the new Social Assistance service model in Ontario. ESS has also continued to actively respond to the needs of residents and current social assistance recipients all throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. To align to the new provincial vision, ESS is re-organizing its service delivery approach, leveraging what we have learned from Covid-19 and integrating input from staff, clients and community partners.

To advance this work, in early 2021, ESS adopted a Change Commitment Vision and key principles.

Vision:

A resilient, healthy, diverse and inclusive workforce, embracing new opportunities and ways of working in support of our clients and community.

Key Principles:

- Engage Staff
- Be Transparent
- Build Our Community
- Foster Equity and Inclusion
- Collaborate
- Celebrate Our Success

This Commitment has guided our planning work to date and is reflected in the various initiatives already underway. Examples include:

- Enhancing Outreach and Mobile Services – A team of Ontario Works Staff were deployed at the end of 2020 to bring services and supports directly to residents in the community. The focus of the prototype was to support vulnerable residents impacted the most by the pandemic. Staff met with residents at the Respite and Physical Distancing centres and worked with community partners to wrap services and supports around the residents to meet their needs. The results of this prototype are being integrated into plans to expand mobile services.
- Preparing for Change - Created a structure within the service area to support the planning and implementation of social assistance modernization and integration projects and initiatives. This includes change management planning, new staff informed training plans, and staff led work groups that provide input based on expertise and support the design and implementation of projects/prototypes.

- Alignment of Employment Services - Staff who have been providing employment services and supports as part of the Ontario Works program have been functionally aligned to the City's Employment Ontario program to ensure the City is well positioned to continue to be an Employment Ontario service provider in Ottawa.
- Advisory Groups – A Social Assistance Community Advisory Group and a Lived Experience Advisory Group have been launched to assist the service area in integrating both a community and client voice in transforming service offerings from a financial assistance focus, to wrap-around life stabilization support for low-income residents.

Preliminary design of the local service delivery model includes:

- Services provided in-person, virtually and mobile/in the community.
- Integrated life stabilization teams will provide crisis intervention, case management and service navigation and focus on community priorities such as Indigenous services, mental health, support for newcomers and youth.
- Mobile services teams will continue to be a part of the service delivery model moving forward; this approach provides an opportunity for direct life stabilization services in priority neighbourhoods within the city, in both urban and rural settings.
- Life stabilization community hubs will be situated to provide an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to providing life stabilization supports to residents, in one accessible location. Community service providers will be invited to co-locate in these hubs, further enhancing the potential for integrated wraparound service delivery.

Employment and Social Services will begin to prototype our local service delivery model, as part of our managed re-entry plans. This will enable us to test and refine the service concepts and design and to ensure alignment with the final Provincial Social Assistance service model. Modifications will be made as we learn more about the outcome of the Provincial-Municipal Co-design process.

While Social Assistance Modernization looks at multiple aspects of the program design and delivery to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system, the process does not include a review or adjustment of the current social assistance rates in Ontario.

In the 1990s, under an austerity government, social assistance rates were dramatically reduced (OW 21.6%) or frozen, as was the case with ODSP rates. Rates remained at those levels until 2003. From 2003 to 2018, the rates did increase, however it was not sufficient to keep pace with the rising cost of food and shelter. Today, a single person on Ontario Works assistance receives a maximum of \$733 a month, a \$110 increase from 1995, approximately \$4.40 increase per year or a cumulative increase of 16.5%. The last Social Assistance rate increase was in the fall of 2018.

Currently in Ottawa, the average monthly rent for a bachelor apartment is \$1000 and a one-bedroom apartment is \$1244¹. Every month, residents receiving Social Assistance make the hard decisions about whether to pay bills or buy food and struggle to meet other very basic needs. The social assistance rate increases have not kept pace with inflation. Inadequate rates continue to be a barrier to successful life stabilization for many residents.

In addition, it has long been recommended that the Province review, simplify and streamline the approximately 800 rules and regulations that govern Social Assistance in Ontario. This would support residents, who need social assistance as part of their life stabilization plan, to focus on life stabilization activities on their path to employment versus focusing energy on meeting complex eligibility requirements. This is also not in scope for Social Assistance Modernization.

Budget and Operational Implications

The Province has confirmed that the current OW funding model and the Employment Ontario funding envelope will remain in place for 2022. As previously mentioned, the City is planning for potential funding implications resulting from Employment Services Transformation (EST) and Social Assistance Modernization in 2023 or 2024.

As a result, it is anticipated that there will be workforce adjustments. As the service delivery model is defined, the staff necessary to support the model will be determined. We are committed to minimize impact on employees to the greatest extent possible, ensuring staff are well informed and supported, and all impacted groups are provided with clear and transparent communication. The service area management has been engaging with union partners since the Province's vision for Social Assistance Modernization was shared earlier this year and will continue to do so in the mutual interest of staff wellbeing.

The co-design process includes determining the funding model for the new system. Municipalities have communicated the need for funding to adequately address the effort required to deliver life stabilization services for OW and ODSP recipients, recognizing the various levels of intensity that will be required for different segments of the population served. It is anticipated that funding will be partially tied to performance and

¹ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Rental Market Survey Data Tables (2020). Retrieved from: [Rental Market Survey Data Tables | CMHC \(cmhc-schl.gc.ca\)](https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/rental-market-survey-data-tables).

employment outcomes as well. Specific details on the final new funding model or how the potential budget reduction will be applied to our overall OW budget are not known at this time. The City is planning for EST to be launched in Ottawa in 2023 and planning for potential funding implications resulting from this change in 2023 or 2024.

Human Services Integration

While the current Provincial focus is the redesign of the Social Assistance system in Ontario, the longer-term vision (2024 and beyond) is Human Services Integration. Human Services Integration is achieved by breaking down silos between ministries and creating greater integration across Provincial and municipal programs (e.g., housing, childcare, life stabilization, municipally funding programs) to connect residents to what they need in order to stabilize their lives. Currently, the City of Ottawa, through Community and Social Services, is the Service System Manager for provincially funded Housing Services and Children's Services, and service delivery agent and service delivery partner for Social Assistance, a legislative change made recently to account for the Province's new role as delivery agent for financial assistance in Ontario. In April, proposed amendments to the Ontario Works Act were tabled in the Legislature that enable the realignment of Ontario Works responsibilities, as well as allow for the future testing and prototyping needed as the new Social Assistance delivery model evolves. Future amendments to the Ontario Works Act are planned in the coming months.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also been a driver for the City of Ottawa toward Human Services Integration. Working together with community partners in response to the pandemic has confirmed a desire and will to come together to address the social and systemic inequities that have been highlighted through COVID-19; particularly the inequities experienced by Indigenous people, Black and racialized communities, women and gender diverse and equity deserving groups. Best practices have resulted from the collaborative work in Community and Social Services and with community partners and these practices and relationships can be leveraged moving forward; we have strengthened partnerships and broken-down silos to serve those most in need.

Human Services Integration is a strategic priority for the Community and Social Services department over the next two years and a dedicated team of staff has been identified to lead this work. The team will examine departmental programs, funding, and services to identify opportunities for greater integration that will, in turn, improve services for residents. The team will engage employees, internal partners, clients with lived experience and community stakeholders to inform the human services integration planning process.

Overall, the provincial vision for integrated human services will necessarily create opportunities for greater collaboration between key ministries. This is an important factor in setting the stage for success locally, where eligibility rules, policies and program parameters of different programs governed by different provincial ministries often abut up against each other. Fully realizing the benefits of integration will

necessitate an all of government approach. Community and Social Services leadership will continue to make the case for this integrative approach. Community and Social Services has begun a process to foster integration of human services, positioning us for achieving the outcomes to be set by the Province as part of the new service model.

Next Steps

Staff will provide further updates to Committee and Council as the Provincial Social Assistance delivery model is finalized. In addition, any financial implications will be presented as part of the 2023 and 2024 Budget processes.

The Province's commitment to modernizing and streamlining social assistance and to work closely with municipalities to co-design the changes necessary to realize its vision are positive and welcome. Over the next year, as more details are released and the co-design process concludes, Community and Social Services will continue to identify, assess and plan for any significant anticipated service, financial or organizational impacts resulting from Ontario's plan for social assistance recovery and renewal.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As described in the report, there are no financial implications in 2021 or 2022 associated with the report recommendations. Implications for subsequent years will be addressed through the budget process in those years.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to implementing the recommendations in this 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 applicable at this time.

CONSULTATION

Employment and Social Services is engaging both community partners and clients with lived experience in preparing for the transformation of service offerings from a financial and employment focus, to wrap around life stabilization supports.

A Social Assistance Community Advisory Group has been launched and includes 32 members representing a cross-sector of community partner organizations. Members share their expertise and contribute to a system-wide perspective to inform the

development of a new Social Assistance model that meets the needs of Ottawa residents. The group currently meets on a quarterly basis, or as needed.

The Lived Experience Advisory Group will focus on how to increase wrap-around life stabilization supports for residents living on low incomes, on Ontario works and over time those on Ontario Disability Support Program and their families. This group will provide valuable insights from a first-person perspective to inform the development of real-time service improvement as well as inform a new service delivery model that meet the needs of Ottawa residents. This group also meets on a quarterly or as needed basis.

The Province has also initiated engagement sessions with community service providers, Ontario Works and ODSP recipients in Ottawa, seeking input to ensure their needs are reflected in the design of the future service delivery model. Employment and Social Services staff are facilitating these engagement sessions and submitting results to the Province. To date, approximately 70 local clients and community partners have provided input into the design of the new Social Assistance delivery model.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The underpinning of Social Assistance Modernization and Transformation in Ontario is to create a system of service delivery 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.

In the new Social Assistance delivery model, the municipal role of life stabilization case management and systems navigation is focused on delivering person-centred supports, working hand in hand with residents in need, to address and breakdown the barriers they are facing to wellbeing, employment, and greater independence.

The Provincial approach to the development of the new Social Assistance service delivery model is through prototyping, which allows for components of the design to be tested and refined before full implementation. Employment and Social Services (ESS) will follow this prototyping approach for the local service delivery model re-design which allows for refinements to be made to ensure accessible services for people with all types of disabilities. Currently, ESS services are fully accessible. In addition, our staff provide employment services to persons in receipt of the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In the future Social Assistance service delivery model, we will also provide life stabilization services to persons receiving ODSP. ESS staff have attended [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, \(AODA\)](#) training and will be offered other training in consultation with the Accessibility Office, as recommended. ESS adheres to City's requirement to be compliant with the [Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation \(IASR\)](#) of the AODA.

The preliminary design of the ESS local service delivery model to align with Provincial changes provides accessible services by offering:

- Services both virtually and in-person
- Mobile services where staff are in the community, closer to where residents live, in areas where they are most familiar and comfortable
- Life stabilization community hubs, situated to provide an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to life stabilization supports to residents in one accessible location. Community service providers will be invited to co-locate in these hubs, enhancing the potential for integrated wraparound service delivery and a potential one-stop for services.
- Client choice of how, when, and where they receive services

As Employment and Social Services begins to prototype the local Service Delivery Model in 2022, staff will consult with the Accessibility Advisory Committee so that input can be provided to help further refine the model from an accessibility perspective.

ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

There are no economic implications associated with this report.

INDIGENOUS GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Employment and Social Services (ESS) has and continues to use an equity and inclusion lens in preparing for the transformation of service offerings from a financial and employment focus, to wrap around life stabilization supports

In developing the membership for the Community Advisory Group, careful consideration was given to ensuring broad, cross sector representation that would provide a diverse range of conversation, ideas, risk assessment and overall input into our future service delivery changes. Examples of some of the organizations who are members of the Community Advisory group include: Catholic Centre for Immigrants, Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, City for All Women Initiative, Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, Ottawa Coalition of Community Houses, Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership, Somali Centre for Family Services, United Way and Youth Services Bureau.

In addition, ESS has engaged with the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition to discuss Urban Indigenous Employment Services and potential service partnerships. 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.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are risk implications. These risks have been identified and explained in the report and are being 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 is further refined, consideration will be given to how to support and respond to the needs of rural residents as it relates to providing Life Stabilization supports and services. Social Assistance is available for all Ottawa residents, including those residing in rural areas.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are not technology implications resulting from the recommendations of this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This report is directly related to the Thriving Communities Strategic Priority; promote safety, culture, and social and physical well-being for our residents.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

N/A

DISPOSITION

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