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**Subject:** New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, April 13, 2021

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## Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report to provide an overview of the province's New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance.
- The new vision aims to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system that focuses on people by connecting them with a range of local services that respond to their unique needs, address barriers and support movement to employment.
- The province intends to work collaboratively with municipalities to co-design the transformation, with a focus on developing a new operating model for social assistance, including updated roles and responsibilities, the revised human services approach as well as a new funding, performance and accountability framework.
- Broad engagement, testing and prototyping will occur in 2021-2022 in anticipation of a provincial roll out of a new human services model in 2024.
- Ontario is facing economic challenges brought on by COVID-19 and Ontario's social assistance system must be ready to support increased numbers of people in returning to employment, independence and stability.

## Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications associated with this report. SAEO has an approved 2021-operating budget of \$133.3M (\$11.9M net tax levy). This operating budget is inclusive of program operating costs and income benefits paid to recipients.

## Analysis

This is the first of two reports and the purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the province's new vision for social assistance. Details outlining system changes

underway in Niagara, early learnings, achievements and challenges that align with the new vision will be presented at the May 2021 PHSSC meeting.

### **Need for Change**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a new approach is needed as more Ontarians are looking for help with basic needs, stabilizing their family's lives, and returning to work and financial security. Ontario's social assistance system must be poised to focus on supporting people back into employment, independence and stability. There is an opportunity to build on the learnings from COVID-19 and fundamentally change how social assistance is delivered.

### **System Changes**

The vision is for the province to automate, streamline and realign functions that are largely administrative, making it easier for people to access the system while maintaining program integrity. It is expected that municipal partners will use their expertise in delivering person-centred case management and leveraging knowledge of local community resources to support people on a pathway to greater independence and employment.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) has started the work of transformation by realigning the roles and responsibilities in the areas of income support and employment services/programs to allow staff to focus on case management.

### **Income Support**

Eligibility for social assistance will no longer be determined at the local level. Individuals in need of assistance now apply through a provincial digital application or by contacting a provincial Centralized Intake Unit. MCCSS will assess and grant the majority of cases through a mix of automation and manual granting and will provide phone support for clients who need assistance with the technology or who need to apply over the phone. In Niagara, the centralized application process launched in February 2021.

### **Employment Services Transformation**

The vision of employment services transformation is to build a locally responsive employment services system that more effectively meets the needs of a range of job

seekers and employers in Ontario. The transformation will integrate employment programs for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program into a transformed Employment Ontario service to create one system. The new employment services model launched in January 2021 beginning in three prototype catchment areas: Region of Peel, Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula and Muskoka-Kawarthas.

### **Human Services Integration**

In the current state, income-tested and publicly funded programs are often seen as difficult to navigate and many clients are unable to access the broader system of supports they need. Human Services Integration focuses on the alignment and integration of children's services, housing, homelessness services and income support programs where possible. By working to build better connections between programs, it is hoped that people will be able to access support outside of their eligibility period for social assistance.

### **Co-Designing the Social Assistance System**

The province will be seeking input from municipal and sector partners to design and prototype elements of the new system. The province is taking an integrative approach to municipally delivered programs as well as building better connections between programs in the community. The provincial vision for social assistance transformation is a starting point for a phased approach to system change and integration. Phases will begin at different times in different regions between now and 2024 with the following timeline:

- Phase 1: 2021-2022. Learning, testing, prototyping the new model and engagement with municipal partners
- Phase 2: 2022-2024. Realign service delivery with human services model ready by the end of 2024

In the spring of 2021, the province will release the road map to a co-designed social assistance system. Stakeholder engagement is expected to occur within the community once the province releases more details regarding the plan.

### **New Funding Model, Performance Measures and Accountability Framework**

The province currently shares the cost of Ontario Works delivery with municipalities. At this time, it is not known how the Ontario Works operational budget that is 100%

provincially funded or the cost of the administration budget that is shared 50/50 will be affected. However, the vision paper does note that there will be no additional costs to municipalities. As transformation continues for employment services and social assistance, the funding model will evolve alongside the system changes. The transformed system will include a new approach to funding and a new performance and accountability framework co-designed between the province and municipalities.

### **Next Steps**

Based on many process improvements already implemented and continuous efforts to align services with emerging provincial policy, SAEO is well positioned to move forward with the first phase of transformation. Details outlining system changes underway in Niagara, early learnings, achievements and challenges that align with the new vision will be presented at the May 11, 2021 PHSSC meeting.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The province's New Provincial-Municipal Vision for Social Assistance aligns to Council's strategic priority of ensuring a "Healthy and Vibrant Community" by creating an efficient, effective and streamlined social services system.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

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|-----------------|--|
| COM 36 – 2019   | Confidential Report- A Matter respecting A Position, Plan, Procedure, Criteria or Instruction to be Applied to Any Negotiations Carried on by or on Behalf of the Municipality under s.239(2) of the <i>Municipal Act, 2001</i> - Niagara Region Application for Service System Manager Employment Services Transformation |
| CWCD 66 – 2019  | Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Announcement Plan to Transform Employment Services   |
| CONF – C 1-2020 | Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development Plan to Transform Employment Services  |
| COM-C 4 – 2020  | Provincial Employment Transformation   |

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