

Issue 1 - August 2021

Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Highlights

Welcome to the first issue of our Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal bulletin. Through this communication, we will provide regular updates on the progress of Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal work including significant milestones, updates from our projects and prototypes, and any upcoming items to watch out for.

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

Co-Design Update

Since March 2021, we have been planning and launching an intensive collaboration process to develop the [Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal Vision](#) that the government announced in February from a high level vision to a more detailed design of a service delivery system we can test and then scale over the coming years.

This co-design work is taking place at the Provincial-Municipal Social Assistance and Employment Committee (PMSAEC) tables supported by broad engagement with social assistance staff and service delivery partners. We are also developing a plan for engaging with clients. We are fortunate to be supported in this work by Deloitte

Canada, who bring expertise in system transformation to help structure an inclusive and collaborative process.

Some of the early areas of focus include better understanding the current state client journey-both our strengths and our challenges-and envisioning a high level future state client journey (or "service delivery blueprint") with more detail around what provincial and municipal roles and responsibilities will be in the new model.

The Plan for Co-Design

This is a complex job that will take 12-18 months. We are thinking about this overall process in three phases, each of which will bring the new service delivery model into increasingly sharper focus:

March to May 2021: Preparation. In this period, we set the stage for co-design through pre-research, early discussion of the vision, early engagement, and designing an overall approach.

June to September 2021: Early Co-Design. In this period, we are taking a first pass through various layers of the new model (such as the catalogue of client services, provincial-municipal roles and responsibilities, service intensity levels for different client needs, service channels, and funding) in order to answer critical questions about service delivery options. These early conversations are helping us understand what the model should look like and moving us toward gathering additional information to build and iterate on proposed options while improving the client journey.

October 2021 to May 2022: Detailed Co-Design. In the period from October to May, we will move toward a more full system design with business processes, tools, and staff functions, all enabled by prototyping and testing elements of a new model.

This process has been evolving since we started and will continue to evolve. Taking an inclusive and evidence-based approach will take time, but this bulletin provides an opportunity for us to keep everyone informed as we do this work.

Recent Announcements

Ontario Works Act Amendments: On April 15, the government introduced proposed amendments to the Ontario Works Act, 1997 to enable further co-design and realignment testing of Ontario Works functions between municipalities and the Ministry in support of the Recovery and Renewal Vision, including an enhanced focus on life stabilization to enable clients to achieve greater independence and financial resilience. These changes are contained in Bill 276, *Supporting Recovery and Competitiveness Act, 2021*, [Schedule 21](#), which received Royal Assent on June 3, 2021.

Employment Services Transformation: On June 10, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) announced the launch of Employment Services Transformation (EST) in a further nine catchment areas across the province. This expansion will be carefully sequenced, happening in several stages between now and the end of 2023.

MLTSD will be using a two-stage competitive selection process to select Service System Managers (SSMs) for each catchment area, beginning with the launch of a Request for Qualifications process. This will be followed by a Call for Proposals (CFP) in the lowest complexity areas (Fall 2021), and with SSMs identified in spring 2022. Medium complexity areas will proceed later with SSMs identified by the end of 2022. The competitive process for high complexity catchments (including Toronto and the North) will occur in 2023. Complexity is being defined by factors related to community readiness and interest, as well as labour market conditions.

In response to feedback from First Nations partners, the government decided that the SSM model will not be implemented within First Nations communities (on- reserve). The province will engage with First Nations communities and other Indigenous partners to develop a model for employment services that will result in better outcomes for First Nation job seekers.

There will be no immediate changes to the access and delivery of employment services for clients in the prototype catchment areas, including First Nations clients who access employment and training services off-reserve. The service

system manager (SSM) model will apply to urban/other Indigenous service providers (off- reserve). SSMs will be required to engage with Indigenous organizations in order to provide employment services to Indigenous job seekers in a culturally supportive way and deliver long-term, sustainable outcomes.

Engagement Updates

Staff Engagement: Between April and June, staff engagement to support the co- design process kicked off with two packages being distributed to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) offices and teams.

- **For ODSP:** members of the ODSP Engagement Forum bring these discussions back to their teams, in collaboration with local managers.
- **For Ontario Works:** the ministry is working with the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) to distribute engagement materials to all 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) and roll up responses.
- **Where feedback goes:** The feedback generated from these discussions is shared with Deloitte and PMSAEC. Action items based on the feedback will be incorporated into the subsequent rounds of discussions at engagement groups to ensure the voice and experience of front-line staff is included in the design and transformation process.

Urban Indigenous Engagement Table: A new engagement table with urban Indigenous partners launched May 26 and is meeting regularly to build a shared understanding of the vision for social assistance recovery and renewal. The table will help to ensure that the social assistance transformation is informed by the experiences of urban Indigenous clients and Indigenous service providers.

First Nations Engagement: We have also been engaging with First Nations partners, including at the First Nations-MCCSS Joint Social Services Table USST), to develop a separate plan to renew social assistance for First Nations communities.

Our Commitment to Equity and Inclusion: The Recovery and Renewal Plan touches on all aspects of how we deliver social assistance - and it will set the stage for profound transformation of programs to support low-income Ontarians. This is a critical inflection point to assess the equity impacts of decisions around the new operating model and to install mechanisms to ensure ongoing assessment of equity impacts as we transition to human services integration in the coming years, as our clients are among the most diverse and vulnerable populations in Ontario.

Treating everyone the same does not always lead to equitable outcomes. Sometimes, meeting everyone's needs may require accommodating people's differences and unique circumstances. It can include taking actions such as providing different supports and identifying and removing barriers to access.

We have reached out to ministry and municipal partners (through PMSAEC) to align with and learn about their strategies and approaches to equity and inclusion. We will provide an update on this work in a future issue of this newsletter.

What We're Hearing

"Making life stabilization a priority for clients will enable them to focus on their immediate needs and should theoretically enable them to find future success in managing many aspects of their lives, not just in terms of employment. This model could support long term successes rather than short term phases of success."

-Ontario Works staff member

"Currently when assisting our clients, we do everything within our discretion within the system to assist them and move them forward in their goals. Our roles and the system create barriers to fully doing so...There is always room for improvements, and linking to community services would be great for clients."

-ODSP Engagement Forum member

"The new vision for service delivery should result in better service for residents and communities, with an aim of making them more prosperous and healthier. Creating pathways to greater independence and employment through life stabilization casework will improve quality of life outcomes for people, contribute to reducing poverty, and help achieve workforce development goals for communities."

-Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)

Implementation Updates

The co-design work is supported by ongoing projects and pilots. Here are some updates from two of them: Centralized Intake and Benefits Administration and Digital Service Delivery.

Centralized Intake

Centralized Intake was developed and launched with seven Ontario Works prototype sites on November 2, 2020. It is designed to optimize the user experience for applicants and reduce the administrative burden for staff, allowing them to focus on supporting clients through crisis and helping them get back to work. Centralized Intake relies on the following components:

- The user-friendly Social Assistance Digital Application (SADA) for online applications to Ontario Works
- The electronic ID portal for ID verification and eSignatures for consents
- A risk-based eligibility determination (RBED) framework, which uses data from the application to determine eligibility, developed in partnership with Equifax.

Centralized Intake Expansion and Progress

- **February 16, 2021:** expanded to 8 more municipalities and enhanced functionality of the SADA application process to include e-signatures.

- **April 26, 2021:** expanded to 5 additional municipalities and enhanced functionality of the RBED process.
- **June 21, 2021:** it expanded to include 14 more municipalities across the province, to provide support to a total of 34 municipalities.
- Collaboration with Ontario Works pilot sites has led to improvements in internal processes and streamlined issues management.
- As we continue to work through challenges in the process and test new ideas, we will provide more information.

Early results from Centralized Intake Pilot

- Over 196 applications received from across 34 municipalities per day
- Approximately 144 applications are processed by the IBAU per day
- 83% of applications received are processed within 4 days

Centralized Benefits Administration

Whereas the Centralized Intake pilot has been focused on Ontario Works thus far, the Centralized Benefits Administration pilot began with ODSP (17 offices so far), and aims to reduce time spent on administrative tasks and paperwork, allowing Caseworkers to spend more time focusing on supporting clients.

As of March 2021, with the focus on payment of invoices and authorization of benefits within the ODSP Customer Service Standards, the team has processed over 63,000 benefits and invoice payments, with over 97% of benefits and 68% of invoices completed within 15 days and has paid out over 27 million dollars to clients and vendors.

The team has also implemented direct-to-IBAU invoicing for selected taxi vendors who can fax or email their invoices directly to a central IBAU inbox. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the time to process invoices and allows payment within the same month they are billed.

Digital Service Delivery

Electronic Document Management (EDM) Update

As of August 2020, all ODSP sites were equipped with EDM tools, including seamless and digital access to client files from within SAMS. We're also making EDM available to interested municipalities, and as of June 2021, 25 municipal/OW sites have access to EDM.

MyBenefits Updates

- MyBenefits is an online service available to Ontario Works and ODSP clients. It allows clients to see their payments and letters, and to report changes through their desktop, tablet or mobile phone.
- My Benefits allows staff more time to focus on high-impact work with recipients, because they spend less time manually inputting recipient information, processing changes, opening/sorting mail and handling incoming phone calls.
- On June 21, we launched **a new messaging feature** on the MyBenefits platform that allows messages and documents to be shared between clients and caseworkers.

What Pilot Site Staff are saying:

"All my clients are very happy and love using Messaging! They picked it up right away with no issues. It is a really easy way to book appointments and advise of required documents."

"The main benefits of Messaging include the quick and easy way to communicate and being able to send and receive documents."

"Messaging seems well organized and searchable. Being able to link into to the file directly from the message is nice."

Upcoming Milestones

- August: Next round of staff engagement
- Fall: Release a "What We Heard" report

More Information

- For more information, see the Recovery and Renewal section on our SA Extranet or contact SA.Renewal@ontario.ca with any questions. We will be adding more information to the SA Extranet in the coming weeks. Check back often for the most up-to-date information.
- Please also let us know what types of things you would like to see included in this bulletin. The next issue is planned for October 2021.