
Subject: Ontario Works Caseload

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 7, 2019

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The 2018 year-end average monthly Ontario Works (OW) caseload was 10,080, a decrease of 3% from 2017.
- More than 1,850 clients started a new job, representing a 22% increase from 2017.
- Niagara earned the full maximum provincial subsidy of \$8.2M for achieving employment targets.
- The Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) team received the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Local Champion award for *Building Employment Networks Niagara (BENN)*, an online system designed to match clients to jobs and training.
- There are a number of anticipated provincial initiatives and policy changes in the coming months that may influence changes to funding, service delivery and caseload size.

Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications associated with this report. SAEO has an approved 2019 operating budget of \$133M (\$15M net tax levy). This operating budget is inclusive of program operating costs and income benefits paid to recipients.

Analysis

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the provincially mandated OW program delivered by SAEO.

The primary intent of the OW program is to help people in temporary financial need find sustainable employment. OW provides basic financial assistance and employment assistance.

Financial assistance provides individuals and families with a monthly amount for basic needs and shelter. Benefit rates are established by the province and determined by family size and shelter cost.

Current monthly OW income benefits are as follows:

Single	Single Parent (one child)	Couple	Couple (two children)
\$733 /month	\$1,002 /month	\$1,136 /month	\$1,408 /month

A single person receives a maximum of \$390 for shelter and \$343 for food/basic needs per month. In 2018, the average market rent for all one-bedroom apartments in Niagara was \$871¹. However, average rent for available one-bedroom apartments was \$1,250². The 2016 Low Income Measure - LIM³ (after tax) for a single person is \$22,133. A single person on OW receives \$8,796 per year, 60% below LIM.

Caseload Size

In 2018, SAEO received over 7,485 telephone and online applications from individuals seeking information about social assistance, down from 8,000 in 2017. As per ministry requirements, financial eligibility must be determined within four business days. On average, Niagara Region grants financial assistance within three business days.

The 2018 year-end average monthly caseload was 10,080 cases representing approximately 17,000 individuals or 3.8% of Niagara's population. Children aged 0 to 17 represent approximately 40% of the total individuals within this caseload.

As noted below, the caseload has decreased over the last two years, consistent with the decrease in the unemployment rate in Niagara.



SAEO also provides employment supports to 600 Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) non-caregiving spouses and non-disabled dependant adults.

¹ (2019, April 16). Canadian M Housing Corporation Housing Market Information Portal

² (2019, April 16). Rent Trends for Apartments in St. Catharines retrieved from <https://www.padmapper.com/apartments/st-catharines-on>

³ The LIM concept is that all persons in a household have low income if their adjusted household income falls below half of the median adjusted income. Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population. Retrieved from: http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/tab/t4_2-eng.cfm

In addition, SAEO assisted over 9,000 individuals or families receiving OW or ODSP to access discretionary benefits. Discretionary benefits include items such as dental care and dentures, funerals, beds, and housing stability benefits (e.g. preventing homelessness through provision of first or last month's rent, rent arrears, moving costs).

SAEO's staff to case ratio of 1:47 remains within the recommended range of 1:35-1:51 (caseload ratios were examined in an externally led staffing review in 2015, identifying Niagara's ratios to be at the high end of the range, relative to municipal comparators).

Distribution

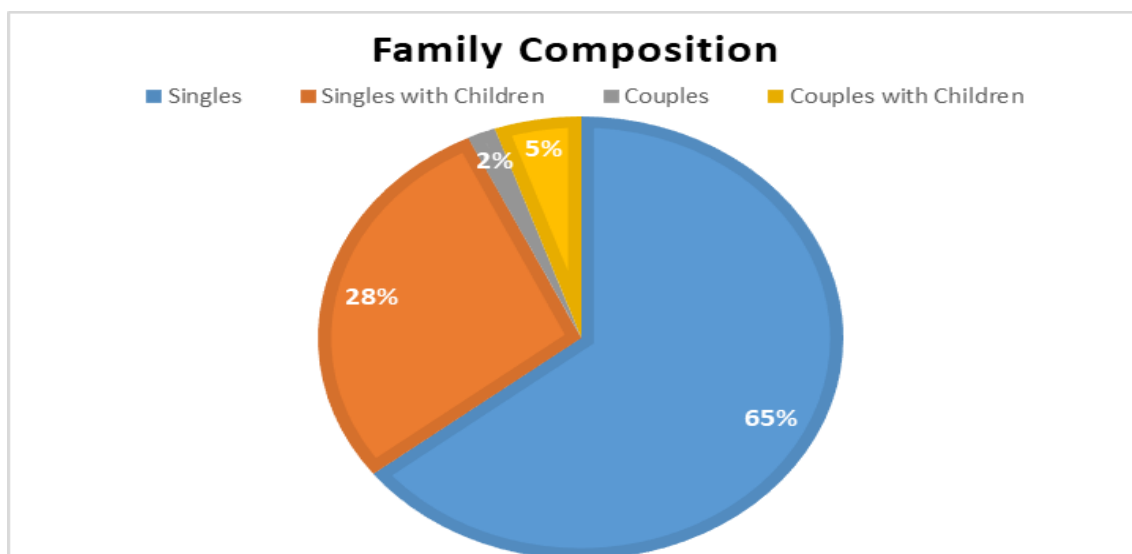
SAEO has five permanent offices: St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Port Colborne, Fort Erie; and three satellite offices: Beamsville, Smithville and Grimsby. The percentage of OW clients per office is as follows:

	St Catharines	Niagara Falls	Welland	Fort Erie	Port Colborne	Satellite Offices
OW Caseload	45%	24%	16%	7%	5%	3%

Family Composition

The caseload consists of various family compositions including singles, singles with children, couples and couples with children.

As outlined below, 65% of OW clients are single, consistent with provincial and municipal comparators.



Case Type

There are four case types:

Case Type	Description	% of caseload
Youth / Learning, Earning & Parenting (LEAP)	Youth under the age of 18 who are unable to reside in their parental home and LEAP - young parents under 25	6%
Newcomers	Individuals and families that immigrated to Canada within the last three years	4%
Temporary Care	Children living with an adult (not parent)	5%
General	Balance of OW caseload	85%

Age

Of the adult OW population, 46% fall between the ages of 20 to 34 years.

Gender

The male to female ratio of OW clients is 46:54 respectively, which is consistent with Niagara population statistics.

Education

Of the OW adult population, 32% do not have a grade 12 education, compared to 11.5% of Niagara residents.

Transportation

In Niagara, 21% of adults on OW have a driver's license and own a vehicle. Therefore it can be assumed that 79% rely on public transportation, walk, bike, etc. in order to job search, attend appointments and interviews and to get to and from work.

Average length of time on assistance

Niagara's average length of time on assistance is 33 months, which is less than the provincial average of 35.7 months.

Employment Assistance

OW clients are required to participate in employment assistance activities that support progress towards sustainable employment. As per the OW directives, staff meet with clients at a minimum every three months to review progress and provide ongoing employment coaching and supports.

In November 2017, SAEO launched *Building Employment Networks Niagara (BENN)*, an online system designed to assess employment readiness and assist staff with aligning employment activities with a client's experience, skills and circumstances. To date, staff have completed over 12,500 employment readiness assessments.

The chart below breaks the caseload into four employment readiness categories:

Employment Readiness Categories	Activities	% Caseload
Life Stabilization	Housing search, referral to or engaged with mental health, addiction services	20%
Preparing for Employment	Training programs, volunteer placements, high school, ESL, life skills workshops	53%
Finding & Retaining Employment	Resume preparation, interview workshops, job searching	27%

The amount of time a client needs to engage in activities designed to help him or her increase employability and obtain sustainable employment varies. Staff issue funding to clients to assist with the cost of purchasing items such as a bus pass, work boots and clothing for interviews to support employment related activities.

Employment Matches

BENN is designed to match clients to potential job opportunities. SAEO Job Developers work with local employers to identify jobs for clients. These jobs are posted in BENN, which generates potential matches for clients based on their skills, experience and interests. Staff contact clients to confirm readiness and provide employment coaching and supports to obtain the position.

In 2018, 1,869 clients started a new job, an increase of 22% from 2017. As noted below, 1,556 of these positions were posted in BENN.

 TOTALS

[View Job List](#)



SAEO Job Developers marketed 130 job fairs to OW clients for employers such as White Oaks, Niagara Parks, Canadian Tire Financial and Tim Hortons. Job Developers offer a full range of customized recruitment and retention supports to employers.

Training Matches

BENN also matches clients to training programs. SAEO supports over 20 training programs, delivered by non-profit and for profit agencies, designed to meet the needs of local employers and clients. Programs range from pre-employment workshops to job specific skills training such as the Home Renovation program. For example, of the ten OW clients who completed the six-week Home Renovation program;

- six people secured employment in the field
- one person is pursuing pre-apprenticeship
- three people are actively job searching.

MCCSS Employment Performance Measures

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) provides Employment Assistance funding to the Region linked to achieving outcome targets. SAEO earned the full maximum employment subsidy of \$8.2M in 2018.

As noted below, the percentage of caseload with earnings in Niagara is higher than both the provincial average and comparators of municipalities of similar size. However, the average monthly earnings in Niagara is lower, reflective of the local preponderance of seasonal, part time work. The percentage of terminations due to employment in Niagara is lower than the provincial average, yet higher than municipal comparators.

MCCSS Targets	Niagara	Province	Hamilton	Waterloo
% of caseload with earnings	16.3%	13.0%	14.0%	13.6%
Avg. monthly earnings per case	\$798	\$868	\$873	\$860
% terminations exiting to employment	17.2%	18.0%	16.5%	16.5%

SAEO is working with Niagara Region's Economic Development division and local economic development offices to explore strategies to increase partnership opportunities that respond to local labour market needs.

Innovation

In 2018, SAEO received the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Local Champion award for the BENN system. More than ten Ontario Works offices have contacted SAEO to explore the use of BENN to support the delivery of social assistance and help people get back to work.

SAEO was one of two successful Ontario Works offices in the province awarded one-time funding to research, develop and test a training program for staff to support Social

Assistance Service Modernization and shift organizational culture from enforcement to a risk-based paradigm. The training will be showcased at the OMSSA Leadership Conference in May 2019.

Provincial Announcements

There are a number of government initiatives that may influence policy, directives, service delivery and caseload size including social assistance reform, social assistance modernization, human services integration and the transformation of employment services. SAEO anticipates receiving more information in the coming months as MCCSS provides program specific funding and policy directives. Changes that may affect funding, client benefits, caseload size, or performance requirements will be shared with council as they become known. SAEO will continue to provide excellent service to our clients, using best practices and ensuring responsible use of the funding we receive.

Alternatives Reviewed

N/A

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

N/A – Pending the development of Council's new Strategic Priorities.

Other Pertinent Reports

N/A

Prepared by:
Lori Watson
Director
Community Services

Recommended by:
Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner
Community Services

Submitted by:
Ron Tripp, P.Eng.
Acting Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Lori Watson, Director, Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities.