

**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social
Services**

**Ministère des Services à
l'enfance et des Services
sociaux et communautaires**



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November 22, 2018

Dear Stakeholder:

Today our government announced a new direction for social assistance in this province.

Over the past few months, I worked with staff in my ministry to develop a plan, building on previous advice, that is responsive and accountable to people and one that will deliver the necessary help to those who need it the most.

Guided by compassion and a desire to empower individuals, these reforms will help move people towards employment and better opportunities.

Our government has outlined a social assistance reform plan guided by the following priorities:

Moving People to Employment

- Introducing new Ontario Works earnings exemptions to encourage employment faster:
 - Recipients will be able to earn up to \$300 per month without reducing their assistance, up from the current \$200 flat rate. Subsequent earnings would be exempt at 25 per cent.
 - Exemptions would start after one month on assistance, instead of the current waiting period of three months.
- Improving employment services for people receiving social assistance, placing a greater focus on outcomes, creating better, more streamlined supports and exploring options for more locally responsive service delivery models.
- Coordinating local services to better connect and deliver supports for people on their path to employment, such as helping people on Ontario Works access mental health and addictions supports.

- Incentivizing people on Ontario Works to find jobs, particularly by allowing lower income workers to keep more of what they earn through the Low-Income Individuals and Families Tax Credit (LIFT) which, if passed, will help an individual worker earning \$30,000 a year keep an extra \$850 per year.
- The province has also launched a website, Ontario.ca to make matching job seekers with businesses easier. Employers can also post job opportunities at employer.jobbank.gc.ca.

Locally Focused Services

- Empowering municipal partners with a modern approach to Ontario Works service delivery that focuses on increased local decision-making and reduced paperwork.
- Simplifying rates and benefits and establishing a new, flexible local discretionary fund so Ontario Works delivery partners can tailor benefits to improve people's outcomes towards employment.

Supporting People with Disabilities with Dignity

- Redesigning ODSP to consolidate complex supplements and benefits into simplified financial support for people with severe disabilities with far fewer reporting requirements. Front-line staff will work with people to help them connect to other supports.
- Providing clarity to the system around who qualifies for ODSP in the future and looking at aligning Ontario's new definition of 'disability' more closely with federal government guidelines.
- Improving earning exemptions for ODSP recipients by introducing a \$6,000 flat annual exemption plus a 25 per cent exemption for earnings above \$6,000 instead of the current approach which reduces support after monthly earnings exceed \$200.

Cutting Red Tape and Restoring Accountability

- Modernizing how services are delivered and introducing more paperless, digital options that will make program delivery more efficient and reduce costs.
- Providing people receiving assistance with more options to access information and service by computer or smartphone which will mean front-line staff can spend more time working with people to address complex needs.
- Restoring accountability at the provincial, municipal and individual level through better oversight, risk-based approaches, public reporting and individual action plans.

The changes we are making will be implemented gradually, allowing our partners, staff and people receiving assistance to adapt. As a first step, our government will work closely with our delivery partners to develop a plan to phase in changes. We will also be engaging with our First Nations partners to develop an approach aligned with the social assistance reform plan for people living in First Nation communities.

I look forward to working with you on our plan to improve social assistance.

Kindest regards,

Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Women's Issues, Immigration and Poverty Reduction

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