



Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario: Discussion Paper 2: Approaches for Reform

Presentation for
Community Services Committee
February 13, 2012



Purpose of this Presentation

- To provide the political context for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario
- To provide an overview of Discussion Paper 2, Approaches for Reform Feb. 2012
- To seek direction to consult in community and make a submission to SARC in time for March 16, 2012 deadline.



Background: Political Context

Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy

- December 2008
- Commitment to review social assistance with a focus on removing barriers and increasing opportunities for people to work

Social Assistance Review Advisory Council

- December 2009
- Appointed to provide advice on scope of the review

Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario

- November 2010
- Tasked with carrying out a comprehensive review, and providing the government with specific recommendations and a concrete action plan for reform
- Final Report Due June 2012

Commitment to deficit reduction by 2018

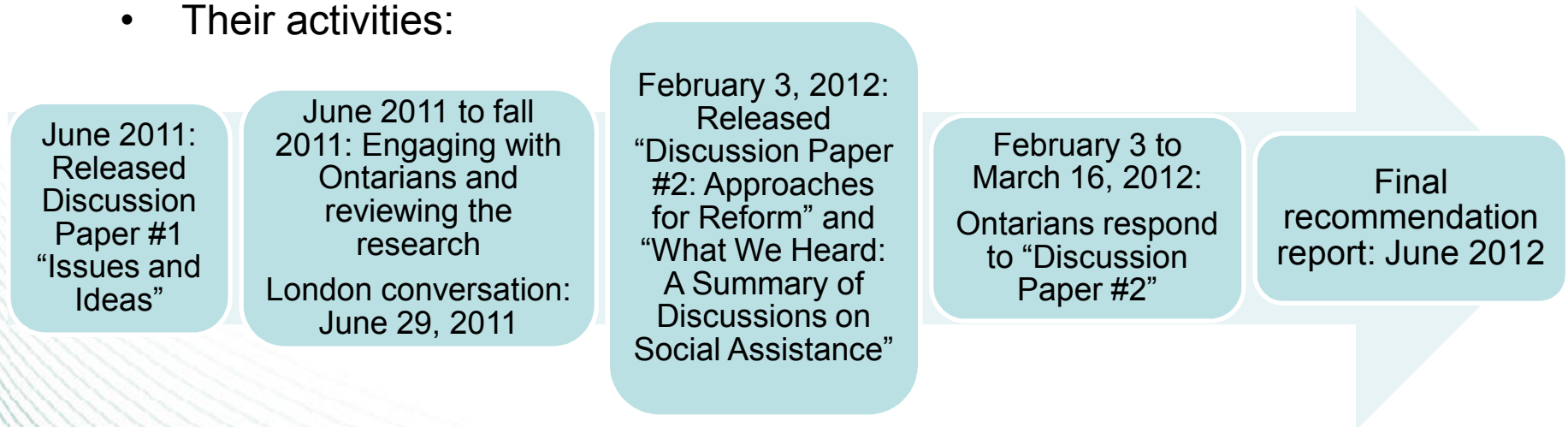
Appointed Commission on the Reform of Ontario Public Services (Drummond Report)

Expected to limit spending growth to 1%, health and education protected



Commission's Task and Activities

- The task: By June 2012, to provide to the Provincial government:
 - Recommendations for **transforming** social assistance
 - Advice on how an Ontario housing benefit aligns with social assistance reform
- Their activities:





Why Respond to the Discussion Paper 2?

- Potential for significant reform that will have a beneficial impact for individuals, families, and municipalities (Delivery of Ontario Works)
- Our opportunity to help shape the reform similar to the work we did previously

Previous submissions that helped shape Discussion Paper 2:

- Report of the June 29, 2011 community input session
- Child and Youth Network: Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Policy Position Papers and Housing Benefit submission



About Discussion Paper 2

- **DOES NOT** provide recommendations
- **DOES** discuss different approaches based on information gathered and additional research
- **ASKS** for further input, focus on practical solutions

Overarching findings:

- Need for fundamental change to system as a whole
- Policies and programs in other areas create challenges for social assistance and constrain approaches to reform
 - Some of the solutions lie outside the social assistance system
- Some changes will take longer to implement than others given the current challenging fiscal conditions and economic uncertainty



Summary of Discussion Paper 2

Structured around 6 main issue areas:

- **Issue 1:** Reasonable Expectations & Necessary Supports to Employment
- **Issue 2:** Appropriate Benefit Structure
- **Issue 3:** Making the Rules Easier to Understand
- **Issue 4:** Making the System Viable over the Long Term
- **Issue 5:** Creating an Integrated Ontario Position on Income Security
- **Issue 6:** First Nations and Social Assistance

For purposes of today's presentation, focus on the first 5 issue areas.



Issue #1:

Employment Expectations and Supports

- Employment is the key route to moving out of poverty
- Employment service needs are broad
- Current system separates social assistance recipients from other job seekers – stigma, duplication, gaps

Looking for input on:

- How to implement key features of effective employment services and supports
- Employment services delivery model: Employment Ontario/municipality
- Expectations for employment participation for people with disabilities



Issue #2: Benefit Structure

- Current benefits below cost of living
- No rational approach to setting them
- Complicated and hard to understand
- Not always consistently applied

Looking for input on:

- Determining adequacy
- Two tier system – lower rates at first; increase if receiving assistance longer
- Options for ensuring fairness for low-income workers not receiving social assistance
- Benefits outside of social assistance: Health, Housing, Income Supplement for people with disabilities, Special Diet
- Merging benefits – shelter, basic needs + special benefits
- Eliminating the “dependent adult category”





Issue #3: Easier to Understand

- Caseworkers may spend 70% of time administering rules, surveillance system of monitoring and risk management
- Current benefit structure contributes to complexity
- Rules around assets complicated and inconsistent with other policy objectives (such as supporting move off of social assistance and saving for the future)

Looking for input on:

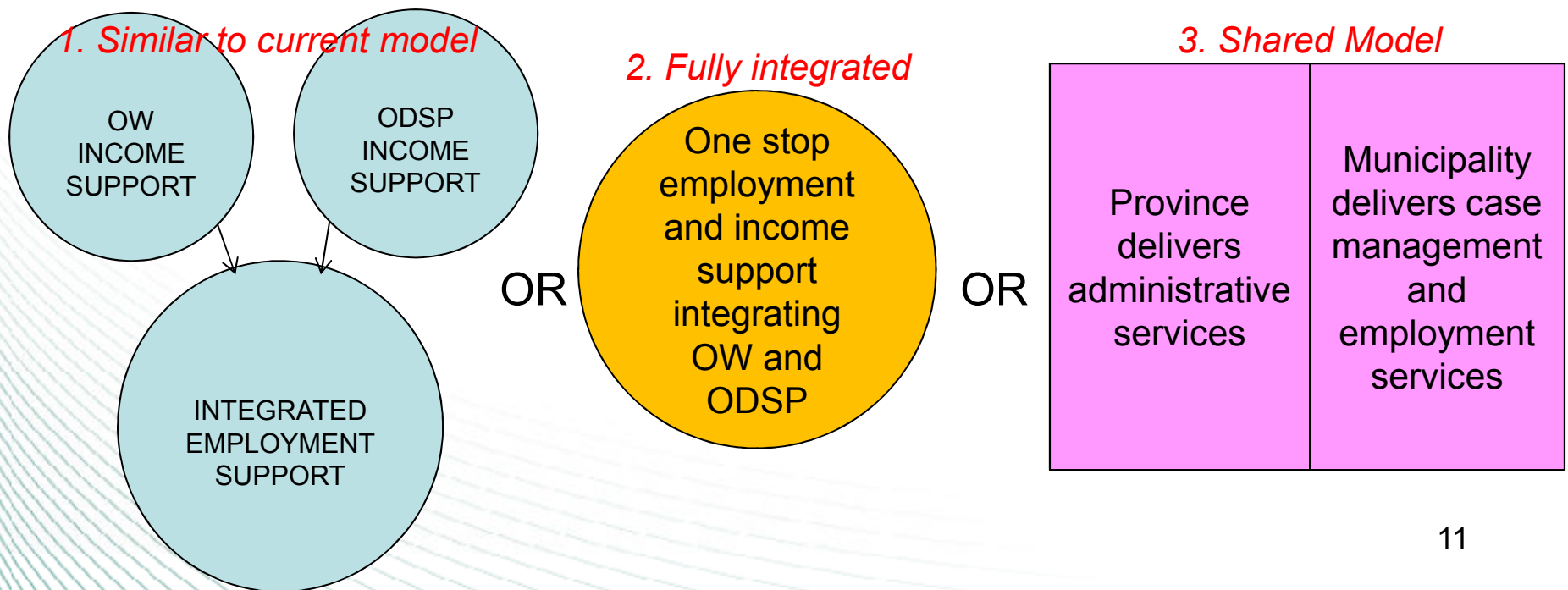
- Audit-based system of monitoring and verification
- Penalties for system misuse
- Changing asset limits

Issue #4: Viable over the Long Term

- Need to make administration of social assistance system and delivery of services more effective and efficient through coordination or integration

Looking for input on:

- Possible approaches to social assistance service delivery system:





Issue #5:

Integrated Position on Income Security

- Inadequacies outside of social assistance put pressure on social assistance

Looking for input

- On policies and programs that:

Impact demand for social assistance

- EI
- Barriers for immigrants

Hinder our ability to improve social assistance

- Access to health benefits
- Tax-benefit system
- Wage policies
- Federal leadership on WITB, affordable housing

Interact with social assistance and affect benefit levels

- Other income support programs
- Rent Geared to Income formula



Recommendation

- That, with regards to the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance (SARC) in Ontario's Discussion Paper 2: Approaches to Reform, the following actions **BE TAKEN**:
 - a) the Executive Director of Community Services **BE DIRECTED** to consult with the Child and Youth Network, the Employment Sector Council of London-Middlesex, the Ontario Works Advocates Group, The London Homeless Coalition and others as necessary; and
 - a) the Executive Director of Community Services **BE AUTHORIZED** to submit a "community response" to SARC by the deadline of March 16, 2012.



Additional Opportunity for Input

- Respond directly to the Commission

<http://www.socialassistancereview.ca/wed-like-to-hear-from-you>



Questions?