

neighbourhood legal services

(london & middlesex) inc. Market Tower, Suite 507 - 151 Dundas St., London, ON N6A 5R7 (519) 438-2890 Fax (519) 438-3145

Jeff P. Schlemmer, LL.B., *Executive Director*
Bruce Wright, M.A., LL.B.
Mike Laliberte, B.A., B.Ed., LL.B.
Monica H. Wolf, B.A.(Hons.), LL.B..

Kristina M. Pagnello, M.A., LL.B
Patty Guinness, *Community Legal Worker*
Micheal Joudrey, LL.B., *Tenant Duty Counsel*

October 17, 2012

Councilor Matt Brown
Community Services Committee
C/O City Clerks Office
Room 308-300 Dufferin Avenue
P/O. Box 5035
London, ON, N6A 4L9

RE: Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB)
October 22, 2012 Agenda Item

Dear Chair and Members of the Community Services Committee,

At this time we would like to provide the committee with additional information as to why our agency and other agencies are so concerned about the loss of the CSUMB program and what will be put in place to try and meet some of/all of the essential needs that CSUMB presently covers.

In their March 2012 budget, the Provincial government noted that they were ending the CSUMB program on December 31st, 2012. The CSUMB is a mandatory benefit under the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability programs. Attached [Appendix 1] is a copy of the Ontario Works directive [ODSP similar directive] that explains what the eligibility criteria for the program is and what is currently available under the program.

The CSUMB was and is an essential program for many OW/ODSP recipients in finding and maintaining affordable housing as well as obtaining other essential needs such as basic furniture, appliances, household items, and clothing. This program was extensively used by Ontario Works and Ontario Disability recipients. Ontario Works London has noted that approximately three million dollars was paid out in CSUMB to Ontario Works recipients for a twelve month period. As ODSP has a similar caseload to OW London's caseload for London/Middlesex (approximately 11,000), it is estimated that ODSP recipients received approximately 3 million dollars as well in CSUMB.

The Province has noted that when CSUMB ends, it will be providing only half of the CSUMB funds to municipalities and this funding will be combined with funding from four other housing/homelessness programs, for local homelessness projects. Many believe this funding

decision is sorely inadequate and a Provincial campaign by legal clinics/community agencies was initiated to try and convince the Province not to proceed on the elimination of CSUMB.

Other municipalities have noted that because of the Provinces decisions in this area, they will in the end receive significantly less yearly Provincial funding for homelessness projects (Hamilton 7 million less, Niagara Region 4.25 million, Kingston 1.7 million). We are aware that some municipalities (ie. Sarnia, Hamilton) are unhappy with the Province's downloading decisions and are asking the Province to reconsider the decision to end the CSUMB program. As well, we are aware that some municipalities are debating what if any, funding their municipalities will provide to offset some of the loss of Provincial funding.

The report of staff to CAPS of September 10, 2012 noted "The vision, recommendations and directions outlined in the London Community Housing Strategy and Community Plan on Homelessness support the vision and policy direction of the Province. London is well positioned to work collaboratively with the community and County of Middlesex to achieve change that supports permanent solutions to homelessness".

We respectfully disagree with this statement for the following reasons:

- We do not support the direction of the province in eliminating CSUMB. It was a mandatory benefit to assist the most vulnerable (those on OW/ODSP) in our society and an appeal process was in place if CSUMB was denied.
- The amount of funding (only half of CSUMB) will be sorely inadequate to meet the needs that CSUMB covered in our community and the "new" program will also be available for non OW/ODSP clients. This is significantly less funding for a larger base of individuals who can access the program. The "new" program may only cover direct shelter costs (utilities/rent) and not other basic items that CSUMB currently covers. It is difficult to envision where individuals can turn to for these basic items (currently some items can be covered by discretionary assistance but this program also will receive less funding from the Province in 2013). We believe additional stress will be placed on other programs such as the Emergency Energy Fund (currently the process was to have those on OW/ODSP first access CSUMB prior to obtaining energy funds).
- We believe that the benefit of "flexibility" is outweighed by the significantly decreased funding from the Province.

We ask that the committee consider the following:

- Should the City of London join other municipalities and request that the Province not eliminate CSUMB?
- In the alternative, should the City request that the Province delay ending CSUMB until March 31, 2013 to allow City and community partners adequate time to develop a "new" program?
- Should the city use some of its own funds to cover the decrease in funding due to loss of CSUMB and decrease in funding for discretionary assistance? The cost of OW is slowly being uploaded by the Province. Should some of the savings from this uploading be diverted into homelessness programs?

Yours Truly,



Mike Laliberte,
Staff Lawyer



MINISTRY OF **COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Ontario Works Policy Directives

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7.5: Community Start-Up And Maintenance Benefit

Legislative Authority

Sections 2 and 8 of the Act.

Section 55(1) of Regulation 134/98.

Audit Requirements

Adequate documentation is on file for the verification of costs to support decisions and level of benefit issued.

This benefit is provided up to the maximum allowable amounts for the specified time period.

Application Of Policy

The Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) is a mandatory benefit provided to recipients to assist in establishing a new principal residence, or to prevent eviction or the discontinuance of utilities or heating in an existing residence.

CSUMB may also be issued where there is a threat to the health or welfare of a recipient or a member of the benefit unit in a non-start up situation.

The amount of the CSUMB payable, as determined by the Administrator, is up to a maximum of \$1500 for recipients with one or more dependent children in a 24-month period; or up to a maximum of \$799 where there are no dependent children in a 24-month period.

CSUMB is issued in situations where the recipient meets eligibility criteria, and within the previous 24 months has not received the maximum amount of the CSUMB to which the recipient is entitled under Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

If a recipient is determined to be non-compliant and a reduction of assistance is applied, the CSUMB continues to be available to members of a benefit unit if the recipient has one or more children.

Each recipient's request for the CSUMB is reviewed on its own merit. CSUMB is provided only where needs have been identified and where no other funds are available.

The approved amount is based on verifiable costs which in the Administrator's opinion are necessary to establish a permanent residence in the community, to maintain an existing residence or to maintain utilities.

Costs must be visually verified and documented in the SDMT. First Nations should visually verify and document costs using their file systems.

The CSUMB may be paid in separate amounts provided it covers only one "start up" event and does not exceed the maximum amounts.

The Administrator may approve additional payments if there are exceptional circumstances.

Establishing a New Principal Residence

Eligibility Criteria

In the case of establishing a new principal residence, CSUMB may be provided if:

- the recipient will be establishing a new principal residence either within or outside the geographic area;
- the Administrator is satisfied that the recipient will need financial assistance to establish the new principal residence; and
- the recipient meets one of the following criteria:
 - is being discharged from an institution that provided for their basic needs and shelter;
 - has satisfied the Administrator that it would be harmful to their health or welfare to remain in their current residence; or
 - has been evicted from their current residence.

Allowable Start-up Situations

In start-up situations, the need for the recipient to leave their residence is clearly identified and documented, and a reasonable plan to move into a new residence is in place.

The start-up event must occur within one month from the date of application for assistance or the establishment of a new principal residence. CSUMB covers a move into boarding, rental accommodation or rent-to-own, but does not cover a move into a per diem funded residence or group home.

The benefit is provided for:

- victims of family violence
- persons who are homeless
- persons who reside in uninhabitable premises (where the uninhabitable conditions are not clearly evident, verification is sought from a third party, e.g., a building or health inspector or physician)
- persons leaving a residence due to:
 - incapacity or death of a supporting care-giver/family member(s);
 - overcrowding within the premises;
 - documented need for children and sole-support parents to relocate;
 - eviction from the premises;
 - employment or training; or
 - a move to more affordable accommodations, where the applicant or recipient was experiencing undue hardship because of extreme shelter costs.
- persons being discharged from institutions such as:
 - correctional facilities;
 - hospitals;
 - hostels;
 - long-term care homes;
 - special care homes; or
 - interval and transition homes.

Allowable Start-up Costs

Examples of the cost of establishing a new residence in the community include:

- clothing
- fuel and hydro deposits
- household furnishings
- last month's rent deposit
- moving and transportation to the home of the recipient
- any other costs approved by the Administrator

Recipient Moving to a Different Delivery Agent

If a recipient is moving from one delivery agent to another, the regular practice is to issue the CSUMB from the delivery agent where the recipient is leaving. This enables the recipient to more easily establish an address in the new community.

There may be situations in which the new delivery agent needs to issue the CSUMB. For example, a recipient has left in an emergency and is already in the geographic area of the new delivery agent.

Under no circumstances is the recipient to be asked to return to the previous delivery agent to access the CSUMB.

Non-Start up Situations

CSUMB may also be issued where there is a threat to the health or welfare of a recipient or a member of the benefit unit in a non-start up situation providing there is eligibility within the 24-month period.

Examples of costs for non-start up situations:

- Costs to purchase/rent a generator where it is required to maintain a recipient's health and welfare.
- Costs to purchase or repair household appliances necessary to the health and well-being of the benefit unit where recipients own their homes and are in receipt of the maximum shelter allowance.
- Costs of new or replacement smoke alarms and batteries for recipients who own their homes and are in receipt of the maximum shelter allowance.
- Costs to eradicate bed bugs where there is an isolated case of bed bug infestation to the recipient or benefit unit's belongings.

Maintaining an Existing Residence

Eligibility Criteria

In the case of maintaining an existing residence, CSUMB may be provided if:

- the recipient will be remaining in their current residence;
- the Administrator is satisfied that the recipient will need financial assistance to remain in their current residence; and
- the recipient meets one of the following criteria:
 - requires an item necessary to maintain the residence (e.g., appliances necessary to maintain the health and well-being of the benefit unit);
 - has received an eviction notice and has satisfied the Administrator that, if a payment is made, they will not be evicted;
 - has had a utility or the heating to the current residence cut off and has satisfied the Administrator that if a payment is made the service will be reconnected; or
 - has received a notice that a utility or the heating to the current residence will be cut off and has satisfied the Administrator that if a payment is made the service will not be discontinued.

Utilities include water and sewage, rental of furnaces and water heaters, and hook-up or reconnection charges for a utility. Heating is considered separate from utilities.

Exceptional Circumstances

There may be situations where there is a need to provide CSUMB more than once in a 24-month period. If exceptional circumstances exist, the Administrator may approve additional CSUMB up to the maximum amount.

The following are considered exceptional circumstances:

- the necessity to relocate as a result of a catastrophic event (e.g., flood, fire);
- the necessity to relocate as a result of domestic violence; or
- the necessity to relocate as a result of a disability (e.g., where a recipient is moving to a home that better meets their disability-related needs).

Other exceptional circumstances may be considered where the Administrator is satisfied that not providing the additional funds would be harmful to the health and well-being of the recipient and/or other members of the benefit unit.

July 2010